The British Army in Afghanistan 2006–14

Task Force Helmand

LEIGH NEVILLE

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER DENNIS

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Elite • 205

British Troops in Afghanistan 2006–14

Task Force Helmand

LEIGH NEVILLE

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER DENNIS

Series editor Martin Windrow

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

HELMAND PROVINCE 6

Extent, natural features and population ▪ The Taliban ▪ Operation 'Enduring Freedom' ▪ The ISAF programme ▪ The insurgency, and the return of the Taliban ▪ Operation 'Herrick IV' – the move to Helmand

2006: COMPOSITION OF 3 PARA BATTLE GROUP 12

The core battalion group ▪ Transport, armour, artillery and helicopter support ▪ Mentoring and reconstruction ▪ Attached foreign units ▪ UK Special Forces ▪ Camp Bastion

2006: THE BREAK-IN BATTLE 17

Early mistakes – failures of local intelligence ▪ Platoon Houses ▪ Sangin ▪ Musa Qaleh 2006–2007: 3 Commando Brigade ▪ Jugroom Fort ▪ 'Advance to ambush'

2007–2009: THE GUERRILLA WAR 29

Combat ISTAR ▪ 'Clear and hold' ▪ Guidance Card Alpha ▪ Recapturing Musa Qaleh ▪ The third turbine

2009–2011: COUNTER-INSURGENCY 38

'Panther's Claw' ▪ '*Moshtarak*' ▪ The beginning of the end

2011–2013: STAGE FOUR TRANSITION 45

ENDEX 50

WEAPONS & EQUIPMENT 51

Infantry small arms: rifle & UGL – LMG & GPMG – marksman & sniper rifles – combat shotgun – pistols ▪ LAWs ▪ HMG & GMG ▪ UK Special Forces

Personal protective equipment ▪ Protected mobility ▪ Counter-IED

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY 62

INDEX 64

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

BRITISH TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN 2006–2014

INTRODUCTION

'Without firing one shot'... That was the hope expressed by the then British Secretary of State for Defence, John Reid, as the first British Army battle group prepared to deploy to Afghanistan's lawless Helmand province in 2006: 'We would be perfectly happy to leave in three years' time without firing one shot.' Even for a politician, this was a spectacularly optimistic wish.

General David Richards, then commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, described the reality on the ground a little differently, explaining that British forces were soon involved in 'some of the most intense warfighting seen since Korea'. The former

An infantry section leader, with the L123A1 Underslung Grenade-Launcher (UGL) mounted on his L85A2 rifle. He is encumbered with both his line-of-sight Personal Role Radio (PRR) on his left chest, with what appears to be a button compass attached, and the larger Bowman platoon radio in his backpack. The 'admin' pouch, with a prominent Union Jack patch, contains a map in a waterproof cover. This image also gives a good idea of the limited visibility encountered in the Afghan crop-fields of the 'Green Zone'. (USMC photo by MC2 Jonathan David Chandler)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Operation 'Herrick' command responsibilities

Herrick I–III, 2003–2006:	Afghanistan Roulement Infantry Battalions (ARIBs)
Herrick IV, May–Nov 2006:	16 Air Assault Brigade
Herrick V, Nov 2006–Apr 2007:	3 Commando Brigade
Herrick VI, Apr–Oct 2007:	12 Mechanized Brigade
Herrick VII, Oct 2007–Apr 2008:	52 Infantry Brigade
Herrick VIII, Apr–Oct 2008:	16 Air Asslt Bde
Herrick IX, Oct 2008–Apr 2009:	3 Cdo Bde
Herrick X, Apr–Oct 2009:	19 Light Bde
Herrick XI, Oct 2009–Apr 2010:1	1 Lt Bde
Herrick XII, Apr–Oct 2010:	4 Mech Bde
Herrick XIII, Oct 2010–Apr 2011:	16 Air Asslt Bde
Herrick XIV, Apr–Oct 2011:	3 Cdo Bde
Herrick XV, Oct 2011–Apr 2012:	20 Armoured Bde
Herrick XVI, Apr–Oct 2012:	12 Mech Bde
Herrick XVII, Oct 2012–Apr 2013:	4 Mech Bde
Herrick XVIII, Apr–Oct 2013:	1 Mech Bde
Herrick XIX, Oct 2013–June 2014:	7 Armd Bde
Herrick XX, June–Dec 2014:	20 Armd Bde

commander of the first British deployment, Brig Ed Butler, later quantified that comment: during the first six months in Helmand, British soldiers expended 'half a million rounds of small arms and over 13,000 artillery and mortar rounds', in more than 500 no-holds-barred contacts with the enemy. In the course of these engagements 35 British soldiers lost their lives. Eventually, a war that would last longer than both World Wars combined would claim 453 British dead, and several thousand wounded, both physically and mentally.

Christened Operation 'Herrick' by a Ministry of Defence (MOD) computer programme, the deployment began as a three-year, fixed-term commitment to stabilize Helmand in a so-called 'peace support operation'; but there was no peace to support, and it soon escalated into brutal asymmetric warfare against a fanatical and cunning insurgent enemy. This book aims to provide a basic summary of the operations conducted and the equipment used by the UK Task Force in Helmand; the author has paid special attention to the early years of the campaign, since he believes that events in this period became central to the outcome of Britain's 'Fourth Afghan War'. Due to the limitations of the series format, it is impossible to provide more than the briefest flavour of a vastly complicated nine-year campaign, and the focus is primarily on 'kinetic' or combat operations rather than on the more strategically important reconstruction and mentoring roles undertaken by the British military. Readers seeking more depth will find in the Select Bibliography on pages 62–63 some of the many excellent official and unofficial tour histories and memoirs available.

This work aims to avoid any political comment – a difficult task when documenting a war that became so highly politicized. Controversies such as the use of the Land Rover Snatch vehicle, and the shortage of transport helicopters, are necessarily mentioned since they impacted on military

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

operations. Due to continuing counter-insurgency (COIN) and counter-terrorist operations by friendly forces in Afghanistan and elsewhere, it is obviously impossible to describe in any detail the technical and tactical capabilities of certain systems, particularly in the fields of Counter-IED and ISTAR (intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance).

OPPOSITE
HELMAND PROVINCE
Helmand's physical terrain consists primarily of arid desert (the 'Dasht'); this is more or less bisected, from north-east to south-west, by the Helmand River, Afghanistan's longest, from which the province takes its name ('Many Dams', in Pashtu). Along the Helmand River stretches the 'Green Zone' of fertile, irrigated land, where the majority of the province's population live and support themselves through primary agriculture – particularly the cultivation of opium poppies. It has been argued that a political wish to combat the drugs trade badly handicapped British military efforts.
In the mid-20th century, American civil engineers undertook a massive project to build a network of irrigation channels and concrete-lined canals to allow agriculture to thrive along the Helmand River. This programme came to an abrupt end with the Soviet invasion of 1979; today these same US-built irrigation channels, many of them now clogged and badly in need of repair, are used by insurgents to ambush ISAF troops.
The Green Zone itself is tailor-made for asymmetrical warfare. It provides ready-made concealment for mines and IEDs, and facilitates close-range ambushes from concealed firing points. The myriad of irrigation channels serve as crude anti-tank ditches, and the densely cultivated terrain itself ensures that armoured vehicles cannot venture far into it. The thick overhead cover also makes identifying targets from the air difficult, even with the advanced optics and thermal imagery now available. War in the Green Zone is an infantry war. (MOD Crown Copyright)

HELMAND PROVINCE

Helmand is one of the most southerly provinces in Afghanistan, sharing a southern land border with Pakistan. It is the largest of all the country's 34 provinces, covering some 23,390 square miles (58,000km²), or roughly the size of the Republic of Ireland, with a population estimated at one million-plus. The provincial capital, Lashkar Gah, is a city of some 200,000 people and a significant historical trading hub. In the north-east of the province is the strategically vital Kajaki Dam, providing limited hydroelectric power to the Helmand Valley – and a constant target for insurgents.

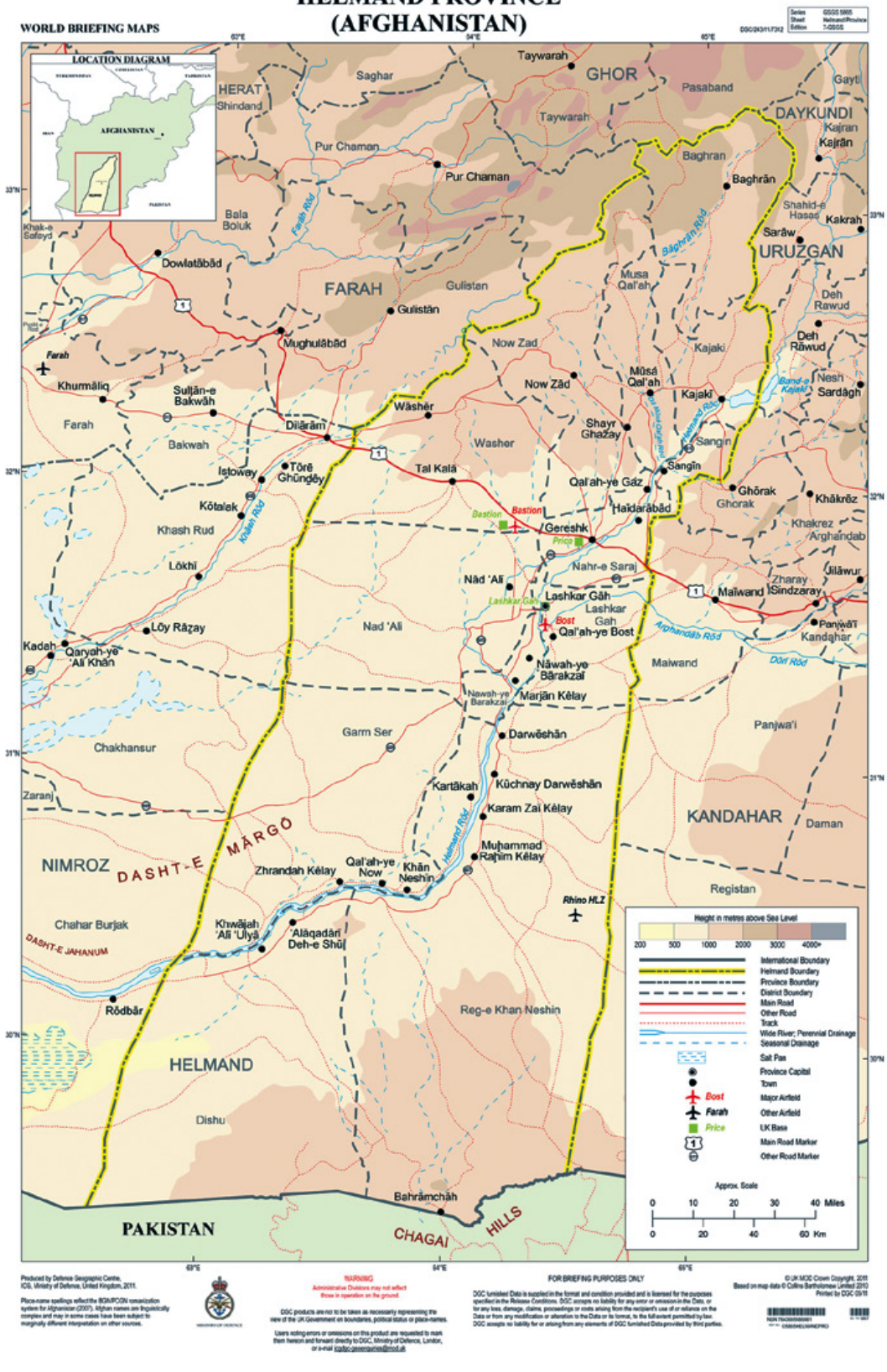
Most of the population support themselves by primary agriculture in the irrigated 'Green Zone' stretching along the Helmand River; running roughly from north-east to south-west, this forms the living 'spine' of the otherwise desert province. Although a number of staple crops such as wheat and rice are harvested in Helmand, the province has become synonymous with the opium trade. Over 90 per cent of the world's heroin originates in Afghanistan and, according to the United Nations (UN), at least 50 per cent of that comes from Helmand, which makes the province the leading drug-producing region in the world. Cultivation of the opium poppy finances insurgents and civilians alike, since most Helmandis make their living to some degree from the drug trade (a fact which damagingly distracted some British politicians). The end of the harvest season, traditionally taking place between April and June, now signifies the start of the fighting season, when poppy farmers become insurgents.

The Helmandis live in timber-framed adobe-style compounds (essentially, condominium villages), each surrounded by high perimeter walls of baked mud mixed with straw. Compounds may be isolated among the crop-fields, or may be built clustered together in groups. Their outer walls can withstand hits from the 30mm Chain Gun of the Apache helicopter gunship, and often require breaching by means of anti-tank bar mines or heavy engineering vehicles. The insurgents turn these compounds into strongpoints by drilling 'murder holes' in the walls, particularly those that face on to alleyways or tracks that British troops may be obliged to use. These loopholes can be disguised with mud or debris until such time as they are required.

Helmand has always been known as something of a wild frontier, viewed with suspicion by the comparatively urbane Afghans in the capital, Kabul. While Afghans have a tribal and familial rather than a national consciousness, all have long memories of foreign incursions into their territories. Their bitter war against Soviet occupiers in the 1980s has not dimmed the legends of the British campaigns in 1842, 1878–80 and 1919. The first of these 'Afghan Wars' had ended in the massacre of a retreating British-Indian force, and the second had seen a famous Afghan victory in 1880 at Maiwand in nearby Kandahar province (the spiritual home of the Taliban) – a victory that still has a celebrated place in the rich oral history of the Afghans. Helmandi hostility towards the *Angrez*, as the British are called in Pashtu, is not a

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

HELMAND PROVINCE (AFGHANISTAN)



© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Moonrise in the Upper Sangin Valley, 2009: a GPMG gunner on 'stag' for Lima Coy, 42 Cdo Royal Marines. Note his pistol in a drop-holster, and the older Osprey Mk 2 body armour featuring external trauma plates. His 'Gimpy' is fitted with a short 50-round belt, which enables an immediate response while the gunner's No.2 readies the next belt. (MOD Crown Copyright)

recent phenomenon. One member of the faculty of the British-sponsored Officer Academy found it impossible to persuade local fighters that 'Herrick' was anything other than an attempt (albeit a perfectly understandable and honourable attempt) by the British to exact vengeance for their great-grandfathers of the 66th Regt killed at Maiwand. A friend of the author, who has completed several tours in-country, recalls a comment made by a village elder to his interpreter during an operation on 'Herrick V' in 2006: 'We have never been beaten. You and the Russians have tried it on many occasions, now the Americans are involved – but you will lose again'.

THE TALIBAN

After the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989, and the consequent fall in 1992 of the communist regime that they had installed in Kabul, destructive internal warfare continued between the forces of rival warlords (most prominently, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar). The Taliban (from *talib*, meaning a religious student) were formed under the guidance of Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Originally a rag-tag Pashtun militia recruited from fundamentalists studying in *madrassas* (religious schools) astride the porous Pakistani/Afghan border, the movement was intended as a strategic buffer for Pakistan against its increasingly unstable neighbour.

Despite their origins as Pakistani proxies, by 1994 the Talibs were beginning to find favour with war-weary Afghans. Many saw life under the rule of this pious militia, led by the elusive one-eyed Mullah Mohammed Omar, as preferable to the brutal internecine warfare that was denying them any chance of rebuilding their country. By late 1996 the Taliban were the dominant faction; controlling the key districts, they declared themselves the legitimate government of Afghanistan, although only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recognized their rule. In that year the Taliban permitted the return from Pakistan to Afghanistan of Osama bin Laden, the Saudi jihadist who had become prominent during the war against the Soviets, together with other leaders of his al-Qaeda terrorist movement.

Operation 'Enduring Freedom'

After the 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA organized by al-Qaeda, Mullah Omar was given the opportunity to surrender Osama bin Laden to the Americans. His refusal provoked Operation 'Enduring Freedom', a counter-terrorist campaign waged by the US and its principal allies, including the UK, to hunt down al-Qaeda elements within Afghanistan. As well as al-Qaeda, their Taliban hosts were also targeted in a textbook example of Special Forces (SF) working with local guerrillas to topple a hostile government. Aided by SF teams and US airpower, the anti-Taliban United Islamic Front for the

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Salvation of Afghanistan (better known as the Northern Alliance) captured city after city, until the shattered Taliban retreated to regroup in the Tribal Territories over the Pakistani border – a traditional safe haven, where the writ of the Pakistani government hardly runs.

The ISAF programme

With the Taliban apparently defeated and al-Qaeda largely destroyed, an international effort began to prevent Afghanistan ever again becoming a terrorist haven. From mid-2002, NATO took over responsibility for this programme by means of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The United States now focused its attention and resources on Iraq, leaving only a modest SF presence in Afghanistan to hunt down elusive al-Qaeda targets, along with a number of conventional unit detachments tasked largely with counter-insurgency.

NATO and the UN developed a plan to improve Afghan stability and kick-start reconstruction, in several distinct stages. ISAF Stage One focused on providing an umbrella of security in the north of the country, to enable the deployment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) – civilian/military teams tasked with local infrastructure development. ISAF Stage Two expanded this security and the PRT concept to the western provinces. ISAF Stage Three was intended to extend this 'security bubble' into the south, taking over responsibility from the residual American teams for Daykundi, Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan and Zabul provinces, and expanding the number of southern PRTs. Stage Four was to be the eventual transition of all security provision to Afghan forces.

The British had contributed aircrews and SF under Operation 'Veritas' from October 2001, before assuming leadership of ISAF for the first six months of its existence under Operation 'Fingal'. In 2003, as part of ISAF Stage One, they undertook security responsibility for Kabul and its immediate environs, providing a rotating series of single-battalion groups designated Afghan Roulement Infantry Battalions (ARIBs), under the newly minted Operation 'Herrick'. It was during a stabilization patrol in Kabul in January 2004 that the first British combat death in Afghanistan was recorded. Grimly, it was also the first death of a British soldier at the hands of a suicide bomber.

Jackal M-WMIK of 3 Cdo Bde providing overwatch; see also Plate F2. Based on a Supacat design for UKSF known as the Menacity, the three-man Jackal offered longer range and increased off-road mobility at the expense of protection, since it was intended to be deployed in rugged terrain where the IED and mine threat was less pronounced. Armed with a centre-mounted .50cal HMG or GMG and a passenger-seat GPMG, the Jackal was as prized for its firepower as for its off-road capability. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A handler and his or her trusty sniffer-dog (in a ballistic jacket) cross a flooded stream in the Green Zone. Male and female personnel from the Royal Army Veterinary Corps' 1st Military Working Dog Regt were attached as necessary to assist with the search for IEDs and weapons; this team are operating with Lima Coy, 42 Cdo Royal Marines. The handler's weapon is the rarely seen L22A2 carbine version of the L85A2 rifle, originally designed for armour and helicopter crews. (MOD Crown Copyright)

The insurgency, and the return of the Taliban

The Taliban leadership spent two or three years licking its wounds in hiding in Sudan before it was ready to return and threaten the nascent progress of the 'new' Afghanistan. There, endemic warlordism was morphing into a generalized insurgency against President Hamid Karzai's government and the ISAF troops supporting it.

The Taliban fighters, known to Helmandis as *Aslee* or 'real' Taliban, represented only one part of the insurgency in Helmand province. Tactical guidance for Operation 'Herrick' noted them as the 'most prominent group', whilst also mentioning other distinct threats from 'national and international terrorist organizations, warlords, drug traffickers (narcos) and local criminal elements'. The Aslee Talibs were termed Tier One Taliban by ISAF: the full-time, experienced insurgents motivated by ideology and a wish to return the country to Taliban rule.

A larger percentage of those considered Taliban by ISAF were known as *Daakhelee* or Helmandi Talibs – local farmers and militiamen who joined the insurgency on a part-time basis, and for a wide range of motives. The paramount importance in Afghan affairs of family and tribe, as opposed to political ideology, should never be underestimated. Some of these insurgents were driven by a thirst for revenge for family members killed or captured by ISAF or Afghan security forces; some by fear that the British would take away their livelihoods by eradicating the opium poppy; and some by hatred of the undoubted corruption and banditry of the Afghan National Police (ANP). ISAF categorized these insurgents as Tier Two Taliban, who either fought alongside the Tier One insurgents in pursuit of common goals, or fought unilaterally to promote their own tribal, family or financial interests. Tier Three were the unfortunates – the poor, the drug-addled, those press-ganged into serving as spotters (known as 'dickers' by British troops), or paid a few *afghanis* to lay an improvised explosive device (IED). Often disparagingly termed '$10 Talibs', these men had little stomach for the fight.

Although much was made in the media of periodical influxes of international jihadists into Helmand, the most commonly encountered foreign fighters were, unsurprisingly, from neighbouring Pakistan. Whilst their actual presence on the battlefield was often debatable, the 'bogeymen' foreign fighters – particularly the notorious Chechens – were often credited with any particularly skilled feat of arms by insurgents who, in reality, were far more likely to be native Afghans who simply got lucky.

Operation 'Herrick IV' – the move to Helmand

For reasons that are still hotly debated, the UK agreed under ISAF Stage Three to assume responsibility for Helmand. The province had been largely untouched by the hand of central government, with only scattered ANP

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

outposts, an American PRT, and the odd SF detachment operating under the banner of Operation 'Enduring Freedom'. The British would be the first foreign forces to go into Helmand in any numbers since the Soviets 17 years earlier. According to the politicians of the time, the deployment was to focus on 'establishing security, enabling reconstruction and countering narcotics cultivation'; it was even officially termed a Peace Support Operation.

What was known initially as the UK Task Force took responsibility for the province from the Americans in May 2006, as part of Operation 'Herrick IV'. (The numerical indicator identified each individual rotation of British forces, generally for a period of six months on an April-to-October/October-to-April cycle.) A charismatic 'one-star' former Special Air Service (SAS) commander, Brig Ed Butler, commanded this first rotation, and wisely tried to ensure that he had as much offensive punch as he could muster in the prevailing political climate. However, while two battle groups with a theatre reserve would have been preferable, Butler was in fact forced to make do with what amounted to a single light infantry battalion with some supporting light armour and artillery as his spearhead. It was apparently not until shaky footage of intense firefights and 'danger close' airstrikes (an airstrike that is inside the minimum safety distance from friendly forces) began to reach UK television screens, and the first body bags began to return home, that the MOD even considered expanding troop numbers.

The Taliban's well-versed propaganda machine was not sitting idle. 'We are here to destroy the British... We will hunt and kill them... We will not let them go back to England and say that they have defeated the Afghans', proclaimed a Taliban spokesman. On the ground in Helmand, too, the insurgents were winning the propaganda battle. Helmandis were told that the dreaded *Angrez* were returning to burn down their poppy fields, and in anticipation of the fighting ahead the Taliban recruited large numbers of itinerant Pakistani farmhands as hired guns.

Afghan conditions required unique solutions to protect the vital Combat Logistics Patrols (CLP) that carried food, water, ammunition, fuel, batteries and all other necessities to isolated patrol bases. This pair of MAN Support Vehicle Enhanced Palletised Load System (SV EPLS) trucks form part of a CLP; note Enhanced Protection Bar Armour (EPBA) incorporating wire-cutters, and protected GPMG mount. Other vehicles employed included Oshkosh Wheeled Tankers, and Demountable Rack Offload & Pickup Systems (DROPS) based on Leyland and Foden SV trucks. Under Project 'Fortress' such vehicles were 'hardened', latterly with Tarian textile armour, and fitted with ECM systems and night-vision equipment. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

The spectacular dust-cloud raised as a sniper from the Counter-IED Task Force engages a suspect device from the rear hatch of a Viking articulated armoured carrier crewed by the Royal Dragoon Guards Viking Group in 2010. The rifle appears to be the .50cal Accuracy International AW50F, issued to British EOD units as an anti-material rifle to disrupt IEDs at extended ranges. (MOD Crown Copyright)

2006: COMPOSITION OF 3 PARA BATTLE GROUP

The May–November 2006 deployment, Operation 'Herrick IV', comprised some 3,150 personnel built around elements of the Army's 16 Air Assault Brigade, to be known in-theatre as 3 Para Battle Group. It is worth examining this structure in detail, since it provided a basic template for future deployments.

At its core, 3rd Battalion, Parachute Regiment contributed three rifle companies and a number of specialist platoons from Support and D Companies. A standard British infantry platoon was led by a lieutenant and a platoon sergeant and normally consisted, at full strength, of three rifle sections of eight men apiece. These sections were each commanded by a corporal, and were further sub-divided into two four-man fire teams. Three rifle platoons along with a small headquarters element made up a rifle company. The battalion's Support Coy included the Anti-Tank Platoon with Javelin guided missiles (ATGMs); the Machine Gun Platoon with both .50cal L111A1 Browning heavy and 7.62mm L7A2 general-purpose machine guns (GPMGs); and the Mortar Platoon equipped with 81mm L16A2 mortars.

D Company consisted of the Reconnaissance Platoon (better known as 'Patrols Platoon') and the Sniper Platoon, along with a complement of assault engineers and signallers (radio operators). Once in-country, many elements of the specialist platoons were later combined into Fire Support Groups (FSGs), tasked with providing direct and indirect fire support to the rifle companies.

Bolstering the core 3 Para components were an eventual three additional rifle platoons and an additional mortar section drawn from lst Bn, Royal Irish Regt and the Royal Gurkha Rifles. Supporting units included the Pathfinder Platoon, a 24-man long-range reconnaissance team; two troops

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

of combat sappers from 51 Air Asslt Sqn, Royal Engineers; Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) operators and Royal Engineer Search Teams (RESTs) to counter the IED and unexploded ordnance threat; Light Electronic Warfare Teams (LEWTs) to gather signals intelligence; and a range of support specialists from the Royal Logistics Corps (RLC), Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers (REME), and 16 Close Support Medical Regiment.

Transport, armour, artillery, and helicopter support

For ground transport the Battle Group would operate a number of largely unarmoured vehicles in keeping with the envisioned 'peace support' role. Reconnaissance and fire support would be undertaken by the venerable Land Rover Wolf Weapon Mount Installation Kit (WMIK, pronounced 'Wimick'). Festooned with machine guns and looking for all the world like a modern incarnation of the World War II Long Range Desert Group in Libya, these vehicles were quickly nicknamed 'Porcupines' by the Taliban. Other 'soft-skins', such as the Pinzgauer Truck Utility Medium (TUM) light truck and the now-infamous Land Rover Composite Armoured Vehicle (CAV) Snatch, provided additional transport.

Armoured mobility for the infantryman was sorely lacking. Counter-insurgency thinking at the time questioned the benefits of armour in operations intended to positively influence the attitudes of the civilian population, even though the dangers of over-reliance on lightly armoured and soft-skin vehicles had become painfully apparent in Iraq since 2004. The only tracked armour earmarked for 'Herrick IV' were a small number of Combat Vehicles Reconnaissance Tracked (CVRTs) from D Sqn, Household Cavalry Regt: the FV107 Scimitar reconnaissance vehicle with its lethal 30mm RARDEN cannon, the FV105 Sultan command vehicle, and the FV103 Spartan command vehicle (which could at least carry four soldiers under some armoured protection). These vehicles received the now-standard 'bar armour' as additional protection against rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).

The Battle Group was supported by its own organic artillery in the form of a battery of 105mm field guns from 7th Parachute Regt, Royal Horse Artillery (7 RHA). A Desert Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV or 'drone') detachment from the Royal Artillery (RA) also provided an 'eye in the sky'. The Army Air Corps (AAC) stood ready with eight Apache AH.1 attack helicopters and four Lynx AH.7 battlefield utility helicopters.

The RAF provided the heavy lift capability with six Chinook HC.2 twin-rotor helicopters. The numbers and availability of these helicopters would become the subject of continued media criticism for much of the Helmand campaign. One Chinook was always on standby to serve as the Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT), literally a flying ambulance with its own doctors, nurses and four-man security team, escorted by a pair of Apache gunships. The MERT was

Guardsmen of 1st Bn, Welsh Guards cautiously clear a compound – note the fixed bayonet. This image provides a clear view of the rear of Osprey Mk 2 body armour, and illustrates the use of 'scrim' netting and 'sniper tape' on helmets. This practice apparently originated with the Paras on 'Herrick IV', and was considered to make the helmet look more 'ally' or warlike (the origin of this slang term is unknown). Netting and tape were later outlawed, as tests showed that they in fact made the helmet more conspicuous. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

supported by a US Air Force Medevac flight known by its callsign 'Pedro', which flew HH-60G Pave Hawk combat rescue helicopters.

Mentoring and reconstruction

Two other elements played a key role in the initial Battle Group's mission: the Operational Mentoring & Liaison Teams (OMLT, pronounced 'Omelette'); and the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The OMLTs, drawn from the airborne gunners of 7 RHA, were small teams of experienced NCOs and officers embedded within Afghan National Army (ANA) battalions *(kandaks)* to instruct and mentor the Afghans. The goal, as in any COIN campaign, was for the local forces to eventually assume responsibility for their country's security, but in 2006 the ANA and ANP were a long way from being capable of achieving that ambitious goal.

The joint military/civilian Helmand PRT based in the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah, was the only organization solely concerned with reconstruction, and it relied upon the Battle Group to establish a secure environment in which to operate. The PRT was tasked with encouraging and supporting reconstruction using, as far as possible, Afghan contractors and labour so as to directly benefit the local population. Common PRT projects involved building schools, providing clean drinking water, establishing medical clinics, and running trade courses to teach practical skills. The PRT was manned by a mixed team from several UK agencies including the Department for International Development, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and a Civil-Military Coordination unit. The British had had some earlier success running the PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif before handing it over to the Swedes, and hopes were high that these results could be replicated in Helmand.

A

UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT (I)

1: GPMG gunner, 3 Para Battle Group, 2006

This tired Para returning from patrol lugs the 25lb (11.8kg) L7A2 'Gimpy'. His Mk 6 helmet has both netting and an old US 'chocolate chip' desert camo cover secured by a lavish application of 'sniper tape', and the single earphone and mic for his PRR can be seen on his left. Allegedly, Paras bought the helmet covers from Aldershot surplus shops because British desert DPM covers were not available from QM Stores. His kneepad is another private-purchase item. His desert DPM 'combats' display his full-colour jump-wings above 3 Para's green DZ flash (right sleeve), and a small full-colour Union Jack patch above 16 Air Asslt Bde's formation patch in subdued format (left sleeve). He wears the older Enhanced Combat Body Armour that was being replaced with Osprey armour during 2006, and has written his 'zap number' and blood group on its relatively small plate carrier over his chest. His belt kit in temperate DPM pattern is pushed to his sides so as to allow him to drop to a prone firing position, and he has slung over his shoulder the belt for his L9A1 Browning Hi-Power pistol.

2: Mortar operator, 3 Para Battle Group, 2006

Another Para during 'Herrick IV', shown defending one of the Platoon Houses, wears and carries as little as possible in the searing heat. He has received a helmet cover in desert DPM and Osprey Mk 2 body armour, and has cut his trousers down to shorts (these would later become an issue item). He is operating the venerable but popular 51mm (2in) L9A1 light mortar; this was due to be replaced when the 40mm L123A2 UGL was introduced for some riflemen, but it still had a superior range, and experience on 'Herrick IV' delayed its retirement. The 51mm mortar was eventually replaced in 2007 with the 60mm Hirtenberger M6-895 infantry mortar, as production of 51mm ammunition was being discontinued. The M6-895 proved equally popular, and offered a doubling in range to 1,500 yards. On the ground beside him is his early model L85A2 rifle.

3: Royal Marine Commando, 52 Infantry Brigade, 2008

This Marine of 40 RM Cdo from 'Herrick VII' during winter 2007/08 is wearing full desert DPM uniform including the cover for his Mk 6A helmet, and Osprey Mk 2 body armour with the optional neck protection. Note the pistol drop-holster worn on his right thigh, and the early issue kneepad worn only on that leg; it is common practice to wear a pad only on the knee to which the soldier usually drops. His L85A2 rifle features the replacement ACOG sight, Picatinny rails, a Grip Pod forward grip/bipod, and a Laser Light Module attached to the foregrip.

1a: Right shoulder, full-colour jump-wings and 3 Para DZ flash.

1b: Left shoulder, full-colour national flash and subdued-format 16 Air Asslt Bde patch.

1c: Right-shoulder Regimental Tactical Flash (RTF) of Ist Bn, Royal Irish Regt, which provided elements to 3 Para Battle Group.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Gunners of 7 Para Regt, Royal Horse Artillery (7 RHA) fire their 105mm Light Guns in support of troops in contact during 'Herrick VIII'. The Australian Army also provided crews on a rotational basis to serve with Task Force Helmand. (MOD Crown Copyright)

An RAF Chinook HC.2 landing to extract a British patrol. The Chinooks were part of the Joint Helicopter Force (JHF) whose rear base was at Kandahar; the JHF also included the Army Air Corps (AAC) Apache AH.1 and Lynx AH.9A assets. Controversy always simmered over the numbers of helicopters available; on early Herrick deployments commanders complained that to lift even a company-sized element required two waves. As Operation 'Telic' in Iraq wound down in 2009 additional helicopters were deployed to Helmand, although most, such as the venerable Sea King, required modification to operate in Afghan temperatures. (Photo by Cpl Si Longworth, RLC; MOD Crown Copyright)

Attached foreign units

There were also two units attached to the British task force from fellow ISAF nations – a Danish mechanized reconnaissance squadron, and an Estonian mechanized infantry platoon. The Danes numbered around 140 well-trained and well-equipped soldiers with a large number of 4x4 MOWAG Eagle vehicles; the Estonians of ESTCOY-1 also brought their own armoured vehicles, the Sisu Pasi. Both vehicles were far better suited to the conditions in Helmand than the majority of vehicles then being used by the British.

UK Special Forces

One other British force element was deployed to Helmand, and indeed across all of Afghanistan: the UK Special Forces. Often referred to as Task Force 84, the UKSF presence included members of the Royal Navy's Special Boat Service (SBS) and the Army's newly established Special Reconnaissance Regt (SRR). The better-known SAS had primary responsibility for Iraq at that

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

time, so the SBS were assigned to Afghanistan. Task Force 84 conduced missions both as part of Operation 'Enduring Freedom' and in support of 3 Para Battle Group; these focused on targeting insurgent leaders and bomb-makers.

Camp Bastion

Before the Battle Group could begin operations it needed a secure base. The mammoth task of providing this fell to the Royal Engineers of 39 Regt, who constructed what would eventually become the largest overseas British military base ever built: Camp Bastion, about 38 miles WNW of Gereshk. Bastion grew from a sea of olive-drab tents in the middle of a desert plain, into a site stretching almost 4 miles by nearly 2 miles wide (*c.*6.5km x 3km), with a main runway to rival those of large commercial airports. Bastion would serve as the headquarters, medical, and logistical hub for the UK Task Force until it was finally decommissioned in 2014, and at times it would also house several thousand US Marines.

2006: THE BREAK-IN BATTLE

Early mistakes

From the start, Operation 'Herrick IV' suffered from what appeared to be a remarkable lack of intelligence on Helmand province, the tribal and family loyalties of its civilian population, and the insurgency itself – and what was available was confused and often contradictory. The respected author Frank Ledwidge quotes a UKSF officer who had conducted recces in Helmand: 'There's no insurgency there now – but if you want one, you can have one'. The then-Deputy UK Chief of Joint Operations was later forced to admit in a 2011 House of Commons report: 'What we found when we had forces on the ground was starkly different from what we had anticipated and hoped for. We were ready for an adverse reaction, but to be fair we did not expect it to be as vehement as it turned out to be'.

The British committed an early blunder when they requested the removal of the then Governor of Helmand, a warlord by the name of Sher Mohammed Akhundzade; he was not only influential among one of the region's largest tribes, but was also rumoured to be heavily involved in the opium trade. After his dismissal for the latter reason the aggrieved former governor allegedly sent some 3,000 of his militiamen to fight with the insurgency, claiming that having lost his appointment he could no longer afford to pay their wages.

Bombarded with disinformation and outright propaganda from all sides, the people of Helmand had no way of knowing who or what to believe. The former British Army captain Dr Mike Martin, author of a ground-breaking study of Helmand, wrote: 'The communities had no knowledge of why there were British soldiers arriving in their villages, and the British had no idea as to who their friends or enemies were'. The Battle Group were thus thrust into their mission with no opportunity to prepare a vital aspect of COIN operations on which the British Army had long prided itself. The local tribes and powerbrokers all had their own agendas, and naturally played on the ignorance of the foreigners. Long practiced in Machiavellian politics, they manipulated the British as they had the earlier US SF contingents, and often

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

denounced political or tribal rivals as Taliban. (Later in the conflict a weary British officer, asked by a civilian who the Taliban actually were, would reply: 'That's what we call whoever is shooting at us this month'.)

* * *

The initial focus for Operation 'Herrick IV' was an area around Helmand's key population centres of Gereshk and Lashkar Gah. Securing these would hopefully establish a triangle of security between them and Camp Bastion – what was later termed the 'Afghan Development Zone'. A Forward Operating Base (FOB) was built near Gereshk, and dismounted patrols were pushed out into the surrounding area with orders to establish contact with the civilian population. 'Soft hats' and greetings of '*Salaam alaikum*' ('Peace be upon you') were the order of the day.

Concurrently, the Battle Group command were coming under increasing pressure from President Karzai and his newly appointed governor to be seen to be supporting the Kabul government right across the province. To appease them, it was decided to deploy garrison forces into the District Centres (DCs) in Musa Qalah, Now Zad and Sangin. These DCs were often the only visible representation of the distant central government, dispensing a limited range of civic services to the local population, and secured by small contingents of often corrupt ANP.

As the British prepared to move platoon-sized elements into the DCs an early operation heralded what was to come, particularly in Sangin. A Desert Hawk UAV had crashed, and the responding patrol was informed by locals that it had been spirited away by insurgents. Turning for home, the patrol was ambushed and one man badly wounded. A Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was dispatched; this was also ambushed, resulting in the death of the first British soldier killed in action in Helmand province. Eventually, suppressing fires from Apache gunships allowed a MERT to land and extract the casualty. This early contact showed that the Taliban were both tactically competent and willing to engage the British toe-to-toe. It also highlighted early deficiencies with British kit (including a lack of night-vision goggles, LMGs and UGLs), and an over-reliance upon the lightly armoured Land Rover Snatch vehicle.

The first planned offensive operation by 3 Para fared little better. The objective of this Operation 'Mutay' was a Taliban leader believed to be based to the east of Now Zad. Patrols Platoon and another from the Gurkhas, tasked with establishing an outer cordon before a company of Paras air-assaulted directly onto the target location, were ambushed. The air assault went in as planned, but found no sign of their target. Signals intercepts led a platoon to the south-east of the target compound, where they too were ambushed. Under supporting fire from Apaches and US Air Force A-10A 'Warthogs', the Paras eventually broke contact. (It was later

B

PATHFINDER PLATOON IN ACTION, MAY 2006

This image shows a pair of Land Rover Wolf WMIKs of 3 Para Battle Group's Pathfinder Platoon at a hastily established RV by a compound outside Musa Qaleh, immediately after escaping a determined Taliban ambush; tracer fire has set a crop-field ablaze. Both 'Wimicks' are armed with a .50cal L111A1 HMG in an overhead ring mount, and a 7.62mm L7A2 GPMG in a fold-out left-side mount for the front-seat passenger (the 40mm L134A1 automatic grenade-launcher – see Plate F2 – was not issued as an alternative to the .50cal until December 2006). Here the gunners are covering their arcs in anticipation of another contact, while the patrol NCO runs between them with 'quick battle orders' (QBOs). These early WMIKS are still painted in NATO green; later versions received a desert-sand overspray.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A rare shot of the long-besieged Sangin District Centre (foreground), with an Apache helicopter just visible overhead (top left), and smoke rising from the target of an artillery fire mission. Note the dense vegetation in the Green Zone along the Helmand River. The Army Air Corps Apache Longbow AH.1s (callsign 'Ugly') were always in high demand for close air support (CAS) missions. As part of the Joint Helicopter Force headquartered at Kandahar, they rotated forward to Camp Bastion to ensure a speedy response to requests from Joint Tactical Air Controllers (JTACs) accompanying ground troops. Pairs of Apaches carried a mix of Hellfire air-to-ground missiles, Hydra rocket pods and their 30mm Chain Guns. They were particularly feared by the insurgents, who called them 'Mosquitos'. (US Army photo by SPC Keith D. Henning)

established that the targeted Taliban leader had been killed by chance by Apache cannon-fire.)

Platoon Houses

In late June, platoons from the Paras, the Gurkhas and the Royal Irish deployed to the DCs in Musa Qalah, Now Zad and Sangin, with the aim of shoring up the ANP garrisons and protecting the local people according to the 'inkblot' COIN strategy[1]. The first signs were encouraging; initial *shuras* (meetings) with the town elders were cautiously optimistic. While they certainly didn't want the British in their towns, the elders understood the financial opportunities of reconstruction. Unfortunately, a UKSF mission in Sangin would change all that, having unintended consequences for British efforts right across Helmand.

Operation 'Ilios' was to have been a relatively straightforward mission to capture a number of insurgent leaders from a compound located on the edge

1 The 'inkblot' concept dates back to operations by Col Joseph Gallient in French North Vietnam in the 1890s. It relied on establishing small garrisons in insurgent areas to create pockets of relative safety for the re-establishment of civil society, with the aim of eventually extending and joining up these spreading 'inkblots'.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

of Sangin. In the event it ended in a brutal three-hour firefight, with two British SF operators killed and several wounded. As with many SF operations, for reasons of operational security the Battle Group were only informed about it when an urgent request for assistance was received. A Gurkha QRF was ambushed when it went to the aid of the joint SBS/SRR team, who were pinned down in an irrigation ditch and fighting off waves of attackers. Close air support finally allowed the Gurkhas and SF to break contact and extract back to FOB Robinson, only to discover that two SF operators were missing. B Coy, 3 Para hastily air-assaulted into an offset landing site and began an intensive search, aided by Apaches overhead. The bodies of both SF men were recovered without further casualties.

This aggressive operation led to immediate recriminations from the local elders, who viewed it as a betrayal of all the British had promised. Suspicious villagers now became openly hostile, and the Taliban were quick to exploit the situation. A platoon commander in A Coy, 3 Para was quoted at the time: 'All over Helmand province, all over Afghanistan, there's Special Forces ops going in left, right and centre... You just learn to live with it. Just on that one occasion, that was the catalyst which turned [the civilians] against us.'

The situation was also reaching boiling point further to the north, as an early patrol into Zumbeley to arrange a *shura* discovered. A lack of civilians in the village should have been a warning sign, but the one local elder who met with the patrol reassured them. After their unproductive meeting he even pointed out a short-cut back to their vehicles – which led them straight into an insurgent ambush. With their FSG also engaged, CAS was needed to break the deadlock, and it was only after a number of running firefights that the patrol finally managed to extract themselves out of the Green Zone.

Sangin

In Sangin, A Coy of 3 Para had wisely spent their first days fortifying the DC with sandbags and hastily constructed *sangars* (reinforced positions). The DC was hardly ideally suited for defence; a deep wadi ran past it, which allowed anyone to infiltrate to within a few yards of the building. Ominously, after the SF's Operation 'Ilios' the Paras had been warned to leave or face the consequences. Barely 24 hours later the Taliban struck, and the siege of Sangin had begun.

The attached FSG had positioned their 'Gimpys' and .50cals in a prominent rooftop tower with good arcs of fire, and built a baseplate position for their two 81mm mortars within the inner courtyard of the DC. This heavy firepower was called upon day-in, day-out to repulse human-wave attacks by fanatical insurgents trying to breach the walls. A Para platoon commander noted that in the two weeks following the SF raid the Sangin outpost was involved in as many as five to six contacts a day. The Fire Support Team (FST: a Mortar Fire Controller and an Artillery Forward Observer) and the resident Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) were kept busy calling in Danger Close fire missions, often only 10 yards from friendly forces.

An RAF Harrier GR.9A deploys flares; it carries a pair of 500lb (227kg) Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) amongst its ordnance, and a Sniper Advanced Targeting Pod to allow JTACs on the ground to see on their Rover terminals what the pod's camera sees. A patrol commander 'in contact' might request CAS via his attached JTAC (callsign 'Widow'), who could call upon any ISAF aircraft within striking distance. The callsign of the Harriers (GR.7As, later GR.9As) was 'Recoil'. They flew in pairs, one armed with 2x 500lb 'dumb' bombs and 2x CVR-7 unguided rocket pods, and its partner with 2x 1,000lb (455kg) Paveway II laser/GPS-guided bombs. By the end of 'Herrick IV' in November 2006, more than 500 bombs had already been dropped in support of ground troops. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

'Top-cover' gunner from Imjin Coy, 2nd Bn, Royal Irish Regt manning his L7A2 GPMG on a Pinzgauer Vector. Though classed as a Protected Patrol Vehicle, this light truck gave little more protection than the Land Rover Snatch, and was judged to be mechanically unreliable under Afghan conditions; nevertheless, it remained in use by EOD, counter-IED and Fire Support teams. (MOD Crown Copyright)

Sangin saw the award of the first of two (posthumous) Victoria Crosses for valour in Afghanistan, to Cpl Bryan Budd of A Coy, 3 Para. Corporal Budd charged ambushing insurgents to give his section a chance to extract several seriously wounded men, and was killed in the chaotic crossfire.

Whilst under siege the Sangin DC had to be regularly resupplied with food, water, ammunition and batteries. Resupply from the air was hampered when one RAF Hercules mission ended in disaster, with the parachuted pallets landing in the Taliban-controlled part of town. The US Army were forced to conduct a dangerous emergency resupply by helicopter to keep the garrison from being overrun. Later, a Canadian Army logistics convoy fought their way through to the besieged Platoon House. One Canadian officer explained the conditions: 'When we arrived in Sangin the locals began throwing rocks and anything they could at us. During the last few hundred metres we began receiving mortar fire.' When the Royal Marines of 42 Cdo finally relieved them the Paras in Sangin had been under siege for a total of 91 days, and had been involved in an astonishing 130 contacts with the enemy.

Musa Qalah

In Musa Qalah the fighting was no less intense. The first British troops into the town had been the Pathfinder Platoon in May, and they were sent back there in June when a British presence was required. Told to hold the DC for three days until relieved, the lightly equipped Pathfinders ended up in Musa Qalah for no less than 52 days. On half of those days they were engaged in prolonged contacts with the enemy; one attack was conducted by an estimated 300 insurgents. Like Sangin's, the Musa Qalah DC was effectively under siege, with helicopter resupply and medevac becoming increasingly dangerous.

Air and artillery fire support helped keep the outnumbered garrison from being overrun (in one two-week period in July 2006 more than 25 airstrikes were conducted in support of the Pathfinders). In a last-ditch effort to reinforce and resupply the garrison (who had been out of fresh water for five

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

days by this stage), the Danish 1st Light Recce Sqn, known as the 'Griffins', fought their way into the DC after several failed attempts. Along with much-needed rations and water the Danes brought more .50cal heavy machine guns, which were quickly deployed for maximum effect.

Early August saw a massive effort to escort a Combat Logistics Patrol (CLP) into the besieged DC to extract the exhausted Pathfinders, insert a relief force from the Royal Irish, and resupply the Danes. Using two companies of infantry and armoured vehicles under Apache cover, the CLP made it through with the loss of only one soldier. Daily attacks against the DC became the norm; the intensity and size varied, but the frequency did not, and the Royal Irish soon suffered their first casualties.

The Griffins were eventually relieved, and the resulting joint Royal Irish/3 Para garrison force became known as Easy Company. It wasn't long before Easy Coy, now reduced to a pair of .50cal HMGs and nine GPMGs in direct support, was again involved in daily contacts. During their time in Musa Qalah, those GPMGs expended a quarter of all the 7.62mm ammo fired by the entire Battle Group, and the garrison accounted for an estimated 20 per cent of the Battle Group's total grenade expenditure. If any further evidence of the ferocity of the battle was needed, RAF Harriers recorded flying over 100 missions in support of the Musa Qalah garrison during a four-week period.

With the DCs under siege, the cavalrymen of the Household Cavalry Regt along with 7 RHA and Patrols Platoon developed a new tactic termed the Manoeuvre Outreach Group (MOG). The MOGs operated mainly in the desert, patrolling into the Forward Line of Enemy Troops to conduct 'shaping' operations and interdict insurgent reinforcements, thus relieving some of the pressure on the harried defenders of Musa Qalah.

In October 2006 a ceasefire deal was struck with the elders of the town, leading to the safe but unsatisfying withdrawal of Easy Company. The deal stipulated that the elders would raise a local militia to provide security and police the town if the British withdrew – in which case the Taliban claimed that they too would leave. The Musa Qalah platoon house had become untenable due to the huge effort required to resupply the garrison or evacuate wounded. The Task Force command knew it was only a matter of time before a Chinook was shot down, since the arrival of a helicopter in the sky over the DC was invariably met by a barrage of RPGs.

The ceasefire actually lasted 143 days before the Taliban, supposedly angered by a US airstrike, seized the town and executed or imprisoned the very elders who had earlier negotiated the deal.

* * *

Across the province, the Battle Group continued to be involved in daily 'troops-in-contact' (TICs). One example was provided by the famed Gurkhas of 11 Platoon, D Coy, who had been deployed to the Now Zad District Centre. As well as fighting a rare sniper duel which saw the company sniper successfully engage four Taliban marksmen, the Gurkhas fired more than 30,000 rounds of 5.56mm, 17,000 rounds of 7.62mm, and 2,000 rounds of .50cal in just one month. The Royal Fusiliers who relieved the Gurkhas ended up in contact some 150 times over a period of three months, killing an estimated 200 insurgents without the loss of a single man.

Despite thinning the ranks of the insurgents, the Platoon House strategy had largely failed in terms of counter-insurgency; it drew insurgents to the

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A Royal Marine of 42 Cdo pictured in 2007, weighed down with kit including a Javelin ATGM reload for a Fire Support Group. With its 'top attack' mode, Javelin could follow a fleeing enemy or punch through the roof of a compound. The Command Launch Unit (CLU) was almost as prized as the missile itself, since it gave the troops an excellent thermal day/night sight. This Royal Marine's L85A2 rifle features the then newly issued Picatinny rails but the original Sight Unit Small Arms Trilux (SUSAT) optic. (Photo by Cpl John Scott Rafoss; courtesy ISAF)

DCs like bees to honey, making the areas far more dangerous and in many cases actually driving the civilian population away. It was also costly in terms of both British casualties and collateral damage to the towns themselves. The air support and artillery fire missions which barely kept the insurgents at bay also killed or wounded an unknown, but certainly not inconsequential number of civilians. Dr Mike Martin: 'The British dropped 18,000lb (8,170kg) of explosive (say, 25 airstrikes) on Now Zad that summer, and flattened the bazaar'.

Some suggest that this may have been a Taliban strategy all along – to threaten the DCs in order to provoke a British response, and then besiege the inserted garrisons. Even if the insurgents were tactically defeated, the pitched battles showed the Taliban to be defending the towns against the foreign invader, and thus boosted their local support. The resulting collateral damage negated much of the PRT's efforts, and cost any sympathy that they might have attracted from an already suspicious population.

As that first tour in Helmand wound down, 3 Para suffered yet more tragedy. A mine-strike incident in Kajaki left five soldiers seriously wounded and caught in the middle of an unmarked Soviet-era minefield. Evacuation of the casualties was delayed when an arriving RAF Chinook set off another mine with its rotor downdraft. One of the Paras died after eventual extraction by an American 'Pedro' HH-60G Pave Hawk. On the same day, in Sangin, another British soldier was badly wounded; the MERT Chinook received small-arms fire as it attempted to land; this delayed the extraction until nightfall, and sadly cost the soldier his life despite the best efforts of the medical team.

During 'Herrick IV', 35 British soldiers were killed in a total of 537 contacts with the enemy. The majority of them were killed by small-arms fire, RPGs and mortars. The fact that fewer than 20 per cent of these contacts were initiated by the Battle Group demonstrates that the troops were largely confined to the Platoon Houses, a strategy that degraded their effectiveness.

2006–2007: 3 COMMANDO BRIGADE

For 'Herrick V' starting in October 2006, 3 Para Battle Group was replaced by 3 Cdo Bde, comprising 42 and 45 Cdos Royal Marines. The new Helmand Battle Group, based on 3 Para's experiences and built around 42 Cdo, included four RM rifle companies, a mortar platoon with double the normal issue of 81mm tubes, and specialist recce and ISTAR assets. The battle group package was completed by an additional Army rifle company; six 105mm guns from 29 Cdo Regt RA, and a Desert Hawk UAV team; the CVRTs of C Sqn, The Light Dragoons; an Engineer Group, and an expanded OMLT team.

The Commandos disagreed with the Platoon House strategy, arguing that killing large numbers of Taliban was not the way to win a counter-insurgency.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Indeed, 3 Para's own after-action reviews somewhat reluctantly noted that 'the focus of 3 Para Battle Group's activity was on the delivery of kinetic effects', to the acknowledged detriment of PRT-based activities. The Royal Marines were determined to conduct a series of large-scale offensive operations, both to force the insurgency off-balance and to win back the initiative they believed had been lost by the Platoon Houses.

In this effort they were aided by several factors. Key amongst these was the addition of a second Battle Group built around India and Zulu Coys of 45 Commando. This second manoeuvre element was termed the UK Land Forces Command Support Group, and was intended to operate both as a theatre reserve and to reinforce the Helmand Battle Group for specific operations. Despite this increase in numbers, many of the infantry platoons (called Troops in the Royal Marines) were understrength, some dangerously so – rifle sections of only five or six men were not uncommon. Platoon patrols were often reduced to half their official numbers through attrition as a result of a number of factors – mid-tour leave, sickness, and combat wounds all impacted. Such a reduced-strength platoon was known as a 'multiple'; it generally consisted of two rifle sections and a small HQ element, with another (also often reduced-strength) section staying at the Patrol Base (PB) to defend it and act as a QRF.

The Royal Marines benefited from the presence of the Armoured Support Troop equipped with the Viking Armoured All-Terrain Vehicle – an amphibious, articulated, two-cabin tracked personnel carrier based on a design previously used by the Royal Marines in the Arctic Circle. The Viking could transport three infantry fire teams in addition to a crew of two, and was proofed against most small arms. It also provided some protection against mines and IEDs; a unique benefit was that the Viking's tracks, designed for snow and mud, displaced its weight in a way that would not detonate most anti-tank mines. For protection against the ubiquitous RPGs bar armour was fitted, and a gunner manned a GPMG in a Protected Weapons Station (PWS) above the driver's cab.

In addition, 3 Cdo Bde received a brand-new weapons system mid-tour: the Heckler & Koch Grenade Machine Gun (L134A1), universally known as

GPMG team from 42 Cdo RM; the gunner wears a locally produced Lima Coy FSG shoulder patch, and has his blood type and 'zap number' written on his helmet cover (see above his right eye). The 'zap number' (normally the first two letters of a soldier's surname, and the last four digits of his service number) is used to identify individuals over the radio net without using names. (Photo by Cpl John Scott Rafoss; courtesy ISAF)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

the GMG. Mounted on WMIKs or on tripods by FSGs, the fully automatic 40mm grenade-launchers were well respected for their suppressive fire abilities – so much so that initial stocks of ammunition ran very low. Finally, late in their tour, the Royal Marines also began to receive the Enhanced WMIK (E-WMIK) with increased armour protection.

Jugroom Fort

Once the Commandos deployed they were initially sent into many of the same areas as the Paras, such as Sangin, Now Zad and Garm Ser. Early tasks included taking over the observation posts at the Kajaki Dam, and conducting clearance operations to allow maintenance of the hydroelectric turbines.

Perhaps the most famous operation of the Royal Marines' first tour was the raid on Jugroom Fort, a Taliban stronghold in Garm Ser, as part of Operation 'Glacier Two' in January 2007. The objective was simple: to raid the fort to demonstrate to the insurgents that they were not safe even in their base areas. After an intense preliminary barrage and aerial bombing to soften up the defenders, Zulu Coy of 45 Cdo advanced cautiously in their armoured Vikings in the pre-dawn darkness. The Vikings were required to ford the Helmand River just 200 yards from suspected insurgent positions, and passed this first operational test of their amphibious abilities with flying colours. As the Royal Marines closed the distance to the fort's walls, insurgents emerged from the tunnels and bunkers they had occupied to wait out the preparatory fires, and engaged the Vikings. Lashed by small-arms and RPG fire, the lead vehicles reached a breach-point blown earlier by a 2,000lb (908kg) bomb and dismounted their infantry. Entering the fort, the lead Royal Marines were engaged in a vicious close-quarter battle resulting in four British wounded; Vikings were brought forward to evacuate these casualties under heavy fire.

C

UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT (II)

1: Trooper, Royal Dragoon Guards, 2010

During 4 Mech Bde's 'Herrick XII' deployment, this trooper from D Sqn, Royal Dragoon Guards has dismounted from his Viking armoured carrier to fight in the infantry role. Previously desert DPM 'combats' had been the norm, with items of temperate DPM sometimes worn in the Green Zone. This trooper has received the trial Multi Terrain Pattern (MTP) uniform based on Crye Multicam as used by UK and coalition SF (see Plate E2). Obscured here, the prominent sleeve pockets bear the ISAF circular patch on his right, and the brigade patch on his left. The cover for his Mk 7 helmet, his Osprey Mk 3 body armour, pack, pouches and gloves are still in desert DPM. He wears clear ESS Crossbow eye protection – goggles and sunglasses with interchangeable clear, yellow and dark lenses were part of the 'black bag' theatre supplementary issue. Lowa desert boots were among types commercially acquired by the Army. His rifle, with the Advanced Combat Optical Gunsight (ACOG) and a Docter mini-sight, is fitted with the 40mm L123A2 UGL.

1a: ISAF right-shoulder patch.

1b: 4 Mech Bde left-shoulder patch.

2: Platoon marksman, 2 Para, 2010/2011

This Para, seen during 16 Air Asslt Bde's deployment on 'Herrick XIII', is armed with the 7.62mm L129A1 semi-automatic marksman rifle with a 6-power ACOG scope; note that he has modified his Oakley Assault gloves by cutting off the fingertips. He wears complete newly issued MTP uniform (including the helmet cover, though this is hidden by the 'scrim' garnish), and Osprey Mk 4 body armour. This licensed derivative of the Crye Multicam uniform was originally specific to Helmand, but has since become much more widely issued. In Helmand sets of desert DPM were retained for use in the *Dasht*, where it was considered superior. On his right-sleeve pocket flap and pocket he displays his jump-wings in subdued black above 2 Para's blue DZ flash. His 'bergen' (pack) appears to be a commercial Blackhawk model in Coyote Tan colour, and he has a mix of tan and MultiCam pouches; MTP pouches would become issue items only in 2012.

3: Infantry patrol point-man, 12 Mechanized Brigade, 2012

For his high-risk role during 'Herrick XVI' this soldier wears the Pelvic Ballistic Protection system attached below his Osprey Mk 4 armour, and carries the L128A1 semi-automatic combat shotgun. Note the red 12-bore cartridges just visible in loops on his armour, along with desert DPM ammunition and PRR pouches attached directly to the MOLLE strips. His upper garment is the Under Body Armour Combat Shirt (UBACS), with the torso made from brown moisture-wicking T-shirt material and the sleeves from standard camouflage material featuring pockets, Velcro attachment points and padded forearms. The black strip hanging from the sleeve pocket is the end-tab of a Combat Application Tourniquet (CAT).

3a: Subdued-format left-shoulder patch of 12 Mech Bde.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

With the mission's primary objective completed and with his force caught in a withering crossfire, the commanding officer ordered his men to break contact and withdraw under Apache cover. It was soon established, however, that one young corporal was missing. In view of the brutality shown to Soviet prisoners by Afghan *mujahideen*, an extraordinary effort was made to find and recover him. An infra-red heat source that experts believed was his body was identified lying against the outer wall of the fort near the breaching point. With no Special Forces available, a very unconventional rescue mission was launched: three Royal Marines and a Royal Engineer volunteered to ride in on the stub wings of a pair of Apache gunships to recover the missing man – a technique developed to rescue downed aircrew, but one as yet untried in combat.

With a second pair of Apaches providing covering fire, the team landed at the fort and in the swirling dust and smoke searched until they located their fallen comrade, then strapped his body under one of the Apaches and flew back to base. Sadly, it was later established that the dead Royal Marine and his wounded comrades were probably the victims of 'friendly fire' from a Viking gunner.

'Advance to ambush'

The Royal Marines took the fledgling MOG concept and made it their own. Now renamed Mobile Operations Groups, these MOGs comprised elements of the Brigade Reconnaissance Force (BRF, a specialist long-range recce platoon similar to the Paras' Pathfinders); the armoured reconnaissance vehicles of the Light Dragoons; and Zulu Coy mounted in their Vikings. A typical MOG could include a dozen Vikings with two platoons of infantry; four FSG improved WMIKs (R-WMIKs); a pair of 105mm guns towed by Pinzgauer light trucks; and their own mortars, medical vehicle, and ISTAR kit such as the Dragon Eye UAV.

MOG patrols lasted several weeks, with resupply at remote patrol laagers out in the *Dasht*. The patrols built up an excellent intelligence picture of the insurgents, particularly in their base areas, where the MOG would advance until contacted by the enemy – a tactic the Royal Marines began jokingly to refer to as 'Advance to ambush'. Once a TIC was declared the MOG had enough firepower to suppress most opposition, allowing the Viking-mounted infantry to either close with the enemy or break contact under the supporting organic artillery and mortar fires.

An FV510 Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV), featuring Theatre Entry Standard-Herrick (TES-H) modifications including multiple wire-cutters, EPBA bar armour and a counter-IED ECM system. The Warriors were operated by the Task Force's theatre Armoured Infantry element from September 2007. Insurgents attempted to disable them with volley-fired RPGs, but soon learnt that it was safer to simply avoid them, forcing the armoured infantry increasingly to assume a light-infantry role, with overwatch from the Warriors' cannon wherever possible. (Photo by SAC Oliver Brant, RAF; MOD Crown Copyright)

During 'Herrick V' attacks on the DCs fell by almost half, and the MOGs and similar 'shaping' operations were apparently successful in keeping the insurgency off-balance. There is also evidence to suggest that after losing such numbers killed during 'Herrick IV' the insurgents were beginning to husband their forces more carefully, realizing that their prospects of actually overrunning a DC were low. The addition

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

of a second manoeuvre element and the new capabilities offered by the Viking Group also reduced insurgent freedom of movement.

The last major operation of 3 Cdo Bde's tour, codenamed 'Silver', was a combined effort with the Canadians and Estonians, and US Army 82nd Airborne Division elements acting as the anvil to the Royal Marines' hammer. The intent was to begin pushing the insurgents out of Sangin and ultimately out of the Sangin Valley itself. British forces advanced through Sangin under Apache cover, engaging in running gun-battles and clearing compounds by using anti-tank bar mines to blow their way in. The operation was deemed a success, with scattered insurgent remnants retreating to Musa Qalah.

By the conclusion of 'Herrick V' the Battle Group had recorded over 800 TICs, many of which were initiated by the Royal Marines' deliberate manoeuvres to win the initiative and take the fight to the enemy. During the tour, 12 men were killed in action: two of them, tragically, by 'friendly fire', and a third by a suicide bomber who detonated his explosive vest next to a Land Rover Snatch in Lashkar Gah. Although most of the fatalities were still from small arms and RPGs, deaths from IEDs were slowly rising. As the war continued, a winter tour in Helmand would sometimes be considered less 'kinetic' as the insurgents bunkered down during the cold season, but 'Herrick V' was certainly an exception to that belief.

2007-2009: THE GUERRILLA WAR

In April 2007 the 'Herrick VI' rotation saw 12 Mech Bde take over responsibility for what was now called Task Force Helmand. The brigade's two battle groups were based around an infantry core drawn from the

Combat ISTAR

Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition & Reconnaissance (ISTAR) was the hidden trump card of the Helmand campaign, saving many British lives. Combat ISTAR is any system designed to provide better situational awareness to a ground force commander. In Helmand, these ISTAR assets included:

- Manned spy aircraft (e.g. the Nimrod) which fed live infra-red vision, or Sniper Advanced Targeting Pods fitted to RAF Tornadoes and Harriers which could transmit directly to a laptop-like device called a Rover terminal.
- Theatre-level UAVs like the MQ-9 Reaper, which has operated over Helmand since October 2007; this can conduct long-loiter surveillance and, if necessary, engage targets with AGM-114 Hellfire missiles.
- Tactical UAVs such as the Hermes 450 or manpack Desert Hawk, which can provide live vision at short-to-medium range and can be controlled by a company or platoon commander.
- Man-Portable Surveillance & Target Acquisition Radar (MSTAR); a device that can detect movement out to 12 miles (20km) in any weather.
- Wide Area Surveillance, conducted by 'blimps' and tower-mounted long-range cameras; useful in detecting and monitoring likely IED and rocket-launch sites.

On the ground, Light Electronic Warfare Teams (LEWTs) worked alongside the infantry in small detachments, with a suite of sensors capable of intercepting and jamming insurgent battlefield communications. The LEWTs could also translate these intercepts in the field, giving the patrol commander immediate actionable intelligence. The best-known device used by both LEWTs and patrol interpreters was the ICom scanner – a handheld unit that intercepted insurgent radio traffic ('ICom chatter'). The Taliban used unsecured portable radios which transmitted in the clear, making interception easy; but they knew that they were being monitored, and sometimes telegraphed their intentions in the hope of provoking a response.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Grenadier Guards, the Royal Anglians and the Mercians. A late but very welcome addition was an extra infantry battle group from 1st Bn, Royal Welsh Regt, which effectively increased Task Force Helmand to three battalion-size manoeuvre elements and a theatre reserve. The Light Dragoons again provided a squadron of CVRTs, while the Royal Tank Regt (RTR) deployed for the first time to man the newly arrived Mastiff 1 Protected Patrol Vehicle (PPV).

The Mastiff would become the vehicle perhaps most synonymous with Britain's presence in Afghanistan. Six-wheeled, heavily armoured, and with the capacity to carry eight infantrymen, it provided a protected mobility capability that had been sorely lacking. Mastiff could, and did, shrug off IEDs that would have disabled a Viking. Mounting a .50cal HMG or GMG, it also had a fearsome punch. The PPVs were crewed by the 'tankies' of 2 RTR as the theatre Mastiff Group; the RTR would also subsequently provide crews for the Warthog Group that would largely replace the Vikings.

The other new capability for 'Herrick VI' was provided by the gunners of 39 Regt RA, who deployed with the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS). Nicknamed the '70-kilometre sniper', the GPS-guided GMLRS is extraordinarily accurate for such a system, and was often used in preference to artillery or mortars. The guided rockets could be dropped onto a specific compound roof or right on top of a firing point, effectively reducing the risk of collateral damage (officially, the rockets were said to be accurate to within 4 yards).

The men of 12 Mech Bde Battle Group focused on undermining the Taliban's 'narrative' in the villages, and attempting to win over the population. Key to this strategy was contesting insurgent authority within the Green Zone between Gereshk and Sangin, by what 12 Mech's OC called 'persistent presence'; each Herrick rotation was beginning to focus on core COIN concepts. When offensive operations were planned, Task Force Helmand made increasingly effective use of the burgeoning number of ISTAR assets

D

'TROOPS IN CONTACT' IN THE GREEN ZONE, *c.*2007

This representative image illustrates a typical 'TIC' with the enemy in the Green Zone adjacent to the Helmand River. Distances and scale have been compressed to fit the page; and for clarity, the details have been tidied up into a 'wargames table' – in reality the crop-fields would be much less neat, the water much murkier, and the vegetation along the irrigation channel very much thicker.

Typically, a company-level patrol usually consisted of two understrength platoons with their attached FST and FSG, who would venture out of a FOB for a patrol estimated to last 8–12 hours. 'Dickers' would inform local insurgents, who would flood into the area on foot using the irrigation ditches, or on motorbikes with their weapons hidden. They would then 'shoot and scoot', engaging the patrol from multiple firing points before caching their weapons and disappearing back into the civilian population – which they often achieved before the Apache gunships arrived. However, some larger contacts lasting up to 3 hours were still being experienced during 'Herrick VI' and 'VII', generally in areas where the insurgents were protecting a leader or a weapons cache.

Here, an eight-man British section **(1)** have been ambushed by multiple insurgent firing points. They have taken cover in an irrigation ditch, and are returning fire to suppress the enemy before attempting to flank them. The patrol commander at the rear is using his Bowman radio to send a quick contact report to the Ops Room ('Contact, Out!'). The GPMG team and LMG gunner at the head of the patrol **(2)** are attempting to suppress the closest firing point **(3)**, but other insurgents infiltrate through the cover along the ditch **(4)**. At the edge of a recently harvested crop-field to the right, an insurgent stands up to launch an RPG; beyond him, others are firing a PKM machine gun from a rooftop (**5 & 6, and insets 2 & 3**).

Meanwhile, on higher ground at some distance to the left **(inset 1)**, elements of an FSG try to positively identify both the enemy firing points and the location of 'friendlies' before engaging. We represent here a R-WMIK mounting a .50cal HMG, a Javelin ATGM operator, and a sniper pair of spotter and shooter armed with an L115A3 rifle.

In the right background, civilians are streaming out of the compound. Civilians leaving or being unusually absent from an inhabited area was considered a strong 'combat indicator'. However, insurgents would sometimes force civilians to stay in compounds that they used as firing points, in the hope that ISAF return fire would hand the Taliban a grim propaganda victory.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A Husky Protected Support Vehicle (PSV) operated by 1st Bn, Scots Guards, possibly being used as a 'casevac' vehicle – note the stretcher strapped to the side of the cargo area. The distinction between 'medevac' and 'casevac' is that the former is an evacuation while the casualty is treated by specialist medical personnel, and the latter is a casualty evacuation by whatever means are necessary and available. Of interest are the wire-cutter fitted to protect the GPMG gunner, the self-recovery towrope, and the multiple counter-IED ECM systems. (MOD Crown Copyright)

available to help them target insurgents (see page 29); once a picture of insurgent activity was developed through ISTAR, a ground assault force would be dispatched to clear the targeted compounds.

'Clear and hold'

With a stated intent to 'clear and hold', British patrols on 'Herrick VI' would often turn captured compounds into strongpoints and stay out overnight in the Green Zone. This task was made somewhat less hazardous by their great advantage in night vision which, as one participant put it, 'really got up the Taliban's nose!'. This approach was also facilitated by the Mastiff Group, which at times operated in a way recalling the tactics of Montgomery's Kangaroo troop carrier-borne infantry in the final push across Germany in 1945. Where the terrain permitted, the Mastiffs would rapidly advance on a target compound, suppressing the enemy with their .50cals and GMGs before debussing their infantry within yards of the target.

In a return to the 'inkblot' strategy, this tour also saw a major increase in the number of temporary PB operations, which involved an infantry multiple occupying an abandoned or rented compound deep in contested territory as a temporary Patrol Base. This was intended to both restrict enemy freedom of movement and establish a presence in contested areas. In choice locations the longer-term objective was to man these PBs with Afghan security forces, to develop a 'security bubble' to both protect local villagers and to allow the PRT to begin reconstruction work.

Not all engagements were on British terms, however, as the Grenadier Guards found out in a not atypical contact at a Vehicle Check Point (VCP) near Garm Ser in May 2007. Insurgents attacked the VCP with small-arms fire before engaging with RPGs. After defending themselves with their personal weapons, GPMGs and 51mm mortar, the British managed to suppress the enemy firing points, allowing the MERT Chinook to evacuate one mortally wounded Guardsman. A Royal Netherlands Air Force F-16 dropped a well-placed 500lb JDAM, which enabled the Guards' extraction.

In June the Royal Anglians conducted a large-scale 'partnered' clearance operation with the ANA into the village of Jusyalay. During the operation they encountered some of the heaviest fighting of the tour, coming up against large numbers of fanatical Pakistani Taliban. Ironically, the locals disliked these foreign fighters more than they disliked the British, and regularly came forward to point out their locations.

The Royal Anglians also suffered the largest loss of life in a 'friendly fire' incident to date, when a US Air Force F-15 delivering CAS dropped a bomb on friendly positions, killing three Anglians. Coming just days after the loss of two other men in operations north-east of Sangin near PB Inkerman, this was a particularly brutal blow.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Guidance Card Alpha

July 2007 saw a significant change to the Rules of Engagement (ROE) under which British forces were permitted to open fire, and this would have a major impact on future Herrick deployments. Previously, Task Force Helmand ROEs had included Rule 429 and Rule 421. Rule 429 was designed to support offensive actions (e.g., allowing preparatory fires from artillery and gunships), and could be described as a 'war-fighting' ROE. More commonly enforced across the theatre was Rule 421 which, by contrast, required that targets be Positively Identified (PID) as armed and showing hostile intent before they could legally be engaged.

The July 2007 change established so-called Guidance Card Alpha as the standing ROE across the province, in response to increasing collateral damage and civilian deaths caused by airstrikes and artillery, and the consequent political fallout from Kabul and Whitehall. Card Alpha was far more restrictive even than Rule 421, in that it allowed deadly force to be used only against targets that were 'committing or about to commit an act likely to endanger life and there is no other way to prevent the danger'. This very defensive set of ROEs is the basis for the common misconception that British troops in Afghanistan 'could only fire once fired upon'. It is worth noting that UK forces could apply for specific exemptions to Card Alpha, reverting to less restrictive ROEs for the period of a particular offensive operation (for example, the December 2007 recapture of Musa Qalah would be conducted under Rule 429).

In September, Operation *'Palk Wahel'* ('Hammer Blow') was launched as the final major offensive operation of 'Herrick VI', aimed at clearing the region around Kajaki and the Upper Gereshk Valley, and pushing the insurgents back toward Musa Qalah. Once they were fixed in Musa Qalah, a larger operation would be mounted during 'Herrick VII' to encircle and destroy them. *Palk Wahel* also saw the first deployment of the Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV) to Helmand; the IFVs were operated by Right Flank Coy, 1st Bn, Scots Guards, known in-theatre as the Armoured Infantry Company or simply 'Warrior Group'.

The number of enemy contacts had increased again during 'Herrick VI' to a record 1,096, largely due to the focus on operating deep within the Green Zone. Fatalities from IEDs also increased, but did not yet exceed those from small arms and RPGs. The Patrol Base strategy was somewhat undermined by the Afghan security forces themselves, who were unpopular with the locals. The ANP were viewed, generally accurately, as corrupt drug-users, while the ANA, recruited from outside Helmand, were not keen on manning isolated garrisons that they feared might be overrun by the Taliban. The commander of 12 Mech Battle Group was eventually forced to concede that his operations on 'Herrick VI' were more akin to 'mowing the lawn' of insurgents than ushering in long-term stability[2].

In October 2007, 52 Inf Bde relieved 12 Mech Bde on 'Herrick VII'. Again built around four distinct manoeuvre elements, it was composed of 40 Cdo RM and battalions from the Yorkshire Regt (Green Howards), Coldstream Guards and Royal Gurkha Rifles. The Household Cavalry again returned

2 Patrick Hennessy's memoir *Kandak: Fighting with Afghans* (see Select Bibliography) is a thoughtful account of service with a Grenadier Guards OMLT attached to an ANA infantry battalion during 'Herrick VI'. While frank about the ANA's weaknesses, the author is fair-minded and informative about the handicaps under which its personnel and units had to operate.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A 2 Para fire team (note blue DZ flash) 'take a knee' while patrolling in Kajaki, 2008; their rifles mount a mixture of SUSAT and ACOG sights, and they carry various commercially purchased day sacks. The practice of wearing T-shirts under body armour – see the heavily tattooed Para in the foreground – was later superseded by the issue of the UBACS, with a 'breathable' torso. (US Army photo by Staff Sgt Jeffrey Duran; courtesy ISAF)

with their CVRTs; the Mastiff Group was this time crewed by the King's Royal Hussars, and the Armd Inf Coy was again drawn from the Scots Guards.

Recapturing Musa Qalah

The expansion by 52 Inf Bde of 12 Mech's 'clear and hold' strategy to one of 'clear, hold and build', included reconstruction and development in their plans. The brigade commander was clear in his intent: 'the people were the prize'. Preparations immediately began for one of the largest and most high-profile joint operations to date: the recapture of Musa Qalah. More than a year after Easy Coy, 3 Para Battle Group had withdrawn under a controversial deal, Operation '*Mar Kardad*' ('Snake Pit') was launched in December 2007 to retake the town from the insurgents.

In the months leading up to the operation, US Special Forces and the BRF conducted preliminary shaping operations to identify enemy weaknesses, while 40 Cdo and the Scots Guards carried out a number of feints and deception operations in the immediate vicinity. At H-Hour, a battalion of the US Army's 82nd Abn Div air-assaulted into the hills north of Musa Qalah in 14 Chinooks, before advancing into the outskirts of the town and engaging the Taliban defenders. British troops from 40 Cdo, 2nd Bn Yorkshire Regt and the Scots Guards' Right Flank Coy maintained a slowly tightening cordon to cut off escape routes before themselves advancing into the town from several directions, accompanied by an ANA *kandak*.

The Taliban in Musa Qalah fought a series of pitched battles, but as their prepared positions were encircled and fell the opposition melted away. Many insurgents apparently blended back into the local population, but Task Force Helmand and ISAF were content with the result. British commanders were quick to report that no artillery or airstrikes had been used within the town of Musa Qalah itself, and the local population began to return soon after the battle ended.

Close-quarter battle, September 2008: men of 5 Platoon, B Coy, 3 Para take cover after 'posting' a grenade into an enemy firing point while clearing compounds during Operation 'Eagle's Summit'. The UGL gunner wears a temperate DPM-pattern helmet cover and DPM belt kit and day sack. Strapped across his back is a collapsed Vallon mine-detector. (MOD Crown Copyright)

'Herrick VII' was notable for a massive increase in the insurgents' use of IEDs, as they finally understood that they could no longer challenge British forces on conventional terms. They also understood the strategic advantages of the IED: it was

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

cheap and easy to produce; it required no resupply, water or sleep; and it lasted as long as the battery pack did. Significantly, all of 52 Inf Bde's combat deaths on 'Herrick VII' were caused by IEDs or accidents.

* * *

May 2008 saw 16 Air Asslt Bde again take command of Task Force Helmand on 'Herrick VIII', but it looked markedly different from their previous tour in 2006. This time they had five battalions: the veterans of 3 Para and 1 Royal Irish, plus 2 Para, Royal Highland Fusiliers (2 Scots), and Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (5 Scots). Two companies from 2nd Bn, Princess of Wales's Royal Regt (PWRR) now served as the theatre reserve. Back again were 1 Sqn, Household Cavalry Regt with CVRTs; the Highlanders (4 Scots) crewed the Warrior Coy, and the Queen's Royal Lancers manned the Viking Group.

'Herrick VIII' also saw the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), US Marine Corps (USMC) deployed to the province to conduct joint operations to clear and hold the town of Garm Ser. The 'front line' to the east of Garm Ser had become static, with Task Force Helmand lacking the resources and manpower to drive the insurgents from the town and surrounding district. The 24th MEU was deployed as a one-off, with responsibility for Garm Ser returning to the British after their seven-month tour. Under Operation *'Azada Wosa'* ('Live Free') in late April 2008, the US Marines had methodically cleared Garm Ser and the surrounding areas and built and deployed PBs to maintain security in the region.

Task Force Helmand continued to conduct operations to ensure Musa Qalah remained secure. In August, insurgents conducted a prolonged siege of the FSG position at Roshan Tower, a disused mobile-phone tower on a rocky outcrop overlooking Musa Qalah. A platoon from 2 PWRR were besieged for nine days by an estimated 400 insurgents supported by mortars, rockets and recoilless rifles. During that time the platoon killed over 100 insurgents at the cost of only one British soldier wounded. The position was later reinforced with a 105mm gun nicknamed the 'Roshan Dragon', which was manhandled into place and direct-fired over open sights.

Operation 'Eagle's Summit': part of the main convoy tasked with delivering the third turbine to Kajaki Dam. Under magnification, the two Mastiffs in the lead can be seen to be fitted with Self-Protection Adaptive Roller Kit (SPARK) mine rollers. Note the supply of water bottles carried, under orange VS-17 air identification panels, on the roof of the Viking in the foreground. Ahead of it, two dump trucks and a grader are ready to fill in any craters or uneven ground encountered – a technique also used by 'Talisman' route-clearance teams. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

'Herrick IX': heavily laden Royal Marines of 42 Cdo advance to their operation start-line alongside a pair of CVRTs. Note the thick antenna of the manpack ECM system carried by the soldier in the foreground, and the Javelin ATGM lugged by the man ahead of him.
The infantryman's munitions load included an average of six rifle magazines with an extra 300 rounds carried in a bandoleer, and a couple of pistol magazines; a dozen 40mm grenades if equipped with a UGL; a smoke grenade and two or three L109 fragmentation grenades; a combination of belts and boxes of link ammunition for the section LMG and GPMG, or bombs for the platoon's 51mm or 60mm mortar; perhaps a Claymore directional mine, and/or an Interim Light Anti-tank Weapon (ILAW) disposable rocket.
Osprey body armour with plates added 44lb (20kg) of weight, plus a ballistic helmet, first-aid kit, some food and, most importantly, water in Camelbak containers with a drinking tube over the shoulder (2–3 litres are needed for every hour of patrolling). On top of all this were the PRR intra-team radio, mine probe kit, night-vision goggles, and perhaps specialist items: a mine-detector, or manpack ECM (weighing 44lb) – and, of course, spare batteries for everything. The combat load could easily top 130–150lb (60–70kg), and all in temperatures sometimes approaching 50° C (120° F). (Photo by Cpl John Scott Rafoss; courtesy ISAF)

The third turbine

September 2008 saw the large-scale Operation *'Oqab Tsuka'* ('Eagle's Summit'), the purpose of which was to deliver a new hydroelectric turbine to Kajaki Dam. Along with Task Force Helmand, soldiers from a number of other ISAF nations took part including the US, Canada, Denmark and Australia. An audacious deception operation fooled the Taliban into attacking a dummy convoy of Danes protected by the SF Support Group, resulting in more than 200 insurgents being killed in a large number of contacts. The real convoy of some 200 vehicles made the 100-mile (160km) journey up Route Harriet in relative safety.

(If the turbine could have been installed it would have increased the power output from the dam by over one-third. Sadly, it was never connected while UK forces were in the province. The Chinese contractors who were to install it withdrew due to security concerns in 2008, and a second contractor failed to make any headway over the following years. A final effort by the American aid agency USAID and the Afghan electricity utility failed in 2014, with the turbine still sitting in its component parts at Kajaki.)

* * *

In October 2008, 'Herrick IX' saw 3 Cdo Bde return to Helmand with a task force composed of 42 and 45 Cdos RM plus battalions from The Rifles, Royal Gurkha Rifles and Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment. The 1st Bn, PWRR manned the Warriors, while the Royal Marines' own Armoured Support Coy manned the Vikings. The Commandos also deployed a unique formation called the Information Exploitation Group (IX Group), which consolidated and commanded all ISTAR assets for the brigade. 'Herrick IX' also saw new equipment and capabilities added to the Task Force, including the highly popular Jackal Mobility WMIK (M-WMIK) to supplement the older R-WMIK, several venerable Sea King helicopters to supplement helicopter lift, and a number of counter-battery radar units deployed at FOBs to detect the firing points of incoming rockets and mortar bombs.

As was now the norm, each battalion group was given either a geographic area of responsibility as the ground-holding unit; the OMLT role; or a theatre reserve role (in this case, filled by 42 Commando). For 45 Cdo, the assignment was Battle Group North and deployment to Sangin, operating from five FOBs

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

and PBs in the volatile Upper Sangin Valley and Kajaki. The 2nd Bn, Royal Gurkha Rifles was Battle Group North-West in Musa Qalah and Now Zad. An attached Danish force, including mechanized infantry and Leopard 2 tanks, became Battle Group Centre based at Gereshk. The 1st Bn, The Rifles was assigned the OMLT task, while Battle Group South was the responsibility of the Queen's Dragoon Guards at Garm Ser.

It was also becoming the norm for each Herrick rotation to conduct one major operation to clear a trouble-spot of insurgents, though the gains achieved were usually soon lost due to a lack of manpower to actually hold the ground. Commanders still argued that more troops were needed, citing the US Marines' efforts at Garm Ser as an example of what could be achieved with sufficient forces. Field commanders were also still frustrated by the lack of helicopter lift available even after the arrival of the Sea Kings; this forced their men to use roads and tracks that exposed them to the growing IED threat, which often tipped their hand to the ever-present 'dickers'. Their logical conclusion was that more helicopters would reduce casualties.

The level of armoured protection available to the British soldier in Helmand was also becoming a highly contentious issue. British media outlets were often guilty of wildly inaccurate reporting, but their central argument was correct: more vehicles suited to the Helmand environment, like Mastiff and Jackal, were needed. The Snatch Land Rover was a death trap that should never have been permitted 'outside the wire'. Even the otherwise popular Mastiff 1 was suffering axle and suspension problems in the harsh Afghan terrain. Steps were being taken by the MOD: the 4x4 Ridgeback had been ordered, as had the improved Mastiff 2, along with a Tactical Support Vehicle based on the Mastiff called the Wolfhound, which could transport 4.5 tonnes of supplies into contested areas – but all this inevitably took time, and it was easy for the media to claim that it was too little, too late.

Operation *'Sond Chara'* ('Red Dagger') was launched in early December 2008, with the aim of clearing Taliban strongholds in Nad Ali and Marjah. Its secondary objective was to shape the battlefield to allow 19 Light Bde, on the forthcoming 'Herrick X', to exploit into the insurgent heartland of Babaji. British, Danish, Estonian, and OMLT-mentored ANA battled through extensive insurgent tunnel and trench systems, all in the pouring rain and freezing cold of the Afghan winter. An estimated 100 insurgents were killed and an IED factory was destroyed; during the fighting four Royal Marines and one Rifleman were also killed.

ln Kajaki the almost conventional warfare continued, with static lines on the map denoting insurgent territory, and the Royal Marines of V Coy dominating the heights. A patrol in December to push into the enemy 'front line' is illustrative. Leaving before first light to defeat Taliban scouts, Patrols Troop and an attached ANA platoon, overwatched by an FSG in Jackals, managed to advance into enemy territory before the insurgents reacted. When the force came under fire from DShK HMGs, RPGs and small arms the enemy firing points were engaged by the FSG, and fire support was delivered by the three 81mm mortars based at Kajaki and the GMLRS at Bastion; the Royal Marines broke contact and withdrew under air cover. Patrols and contacts like this were a daily occurrence.

With the Commando Bde battle groups conducting an increased number of operations into insurgent safe havens, the incidence of IED finds rose from two a week during 'Herrick V' to some 40 a week during 'Herrick IX'. The great majority of the 42 fatalities suffered by 3 Cdo Bde during 2008–2009 were killed by IEDs.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

'Mentors' of the 1 Rifles OMLT during Operation *'Tor Tapus'* in 2009; they are suppressing the enemy with the assistance of an ANA gunner (foreground) manning a Soviet PKM medium machine gun. The Riflemen wear the popular UBACS shirt and Blackhawk kneepads; among the various pieces of kit dumped when the contact erupted are a Vallon mine-detector and an ECM pack. (MOD Crown Copyright)

2009–2011: COUNTER-INSURGENCY

The year 2009 also saw a new ISAF commander arrive in the person of US Gen Stanley McChrystal, a key architect of the special operations war in Iraq. McChrystal conducted a strategic review of the Afghan war which resulted in the so-called 'Afghan Surge', when President Barack Obama deployed a further 35,000 US troops. Britain and her ISAF allies also increased their commitments by a further 7,000 troops, and UK troop numbers in theatre peaked at 9,500 by the end of 2009. McChrystal wanted to use these additional forces to 'swarm' the insurgency in key areas, thus enabling a 'government in a box' approach to be rapidly established in formerly disputed areas like Marjah or Sangin.

With McChrystal's new focus came a new directive on use of force known as 'Courageous Restraint', to be applied apart from and in addition to already existing ROE. It prohibited ISAF forces from using air or artillery support against compounds and other civilian structures except in the most extreme emergencies. In the directive, McChrystal wrote that 'destroying a home or property jeopardizes the livelihood of an entire family – and creates more insurgents'. With these further restrictions on the use of CAS, the British increasingly relied upon the use of 'show of force' flights, where aircraft flew low and fast over insurgent forces, sometimes with afterburners engaged, in an effort to break their morale.

General McChrystal also called for more targeted operations, arguing that 'large scale operations to kill or capture militants carry a significant risk of causing civilian casualties and collateral damage'. Based on his Iraq experience, he also ramped up special operations missions aimed at capturing or killing insurgent leaders, logisticians and bomb-makers. The UKSF, now including two SAS squadrons following the drawdown from Iraq, would be at the forefront of these controversial 'night raids'.

For 'Herrick X' in April 2009, 19 Lt Bde took command with battle group units drawn from the Welsh Guards, Black Watch (3 Scots), Mercians and 2 Rifles. The 2nd Bn, Welsh Guards manned the Armd Inf Coy's Warriors

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

while the RTR again crewed the Vikings, with the Light Dragoons' CVRTs in the armoured recce role. For the first time the Mastiffs would be crewed by the Royal Logistics Corps; this tour also saw the transition to the upgraded Mastiff 2, with improved suspension specifically designed for Afghan terrain, a thermal imager for the driver, and increased armour protection.

'Panther's Claw'

In June 2009, Task Force Helmand launched Operation *'Panchai Palang'* ('Panther's Claw'), with the objectives of stabilizing the areas around Lashkar Gah prior to the upcoming Afghan elections, and retaking the town of Babaji in central Helmand, which had long been under insurgent control. Shaping operations commenced with the Black Watch landing in northern Babaji to establish blocking positions to cut off any 'squirters' (escaping insurgents). They were joined by the Welsh Guards, who deployed into western Babaji in preparation for the final assault in July. This was conducted by a joint force of Light Dragoons and Mercians in conjunction with the Danish Leopard 2 tanks.

The Taliban had buried hundreds of IEDs in defensive belts, and the troops faced 55 IEDs and 53 contacts in just the first two days. Ten British soldiers were killed over the course of the operation, the majority by IEDs; among them was LtCol Rupert Thorneloe, CO 1st Bn, Welsh Guards, who was killed in an IED contact on his Viking. He was the highest-ranking British officer to die in Afghanistan, and the first battalion commander to be killed in action since LtCol H. Jones of 2 Para in the Falklands in 1982. Only weeks earlier a British major had been killed in an IED strike on his Jackal, and a platoon commander by a gunshot wound; this tempo of casualties amongst officers and senior NCOs had not been seen since World War II. The controversial issue of suitable armoured transport was also brought back into sharp focus during this operation when a Viking, driving on a narrow and exposed track bordering a waterway, collapsed the bank and plunged into the canal, almost drowning seven Guardsmen in the process. Critics argued (often with more heat than understanding) that such incidents would not have occurred had more transport helicopters been available.

An element from 2 Mercians in contact with the enemy in July 2009; the smoke shows that the central man has just fired an L72A9 Light Anti-structure Munition (LASM) rocket at an insurgent firing position. Note the mix of temperate and desert DPM kit, and the rocket-firer's DPM assault vest worn over his Osprey body armour. In the background, an ANA soldier with RPG rounds protruding from his pack is evidence that this was a so-called 'partnered patrol'. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Guardsmen of 1st Bn, Coldstream Guards maintain security in a poppy field while awaiting an imminent extraction by Chinook during 11 Lt Bde's 'Herrick XI' tour. The section leader (foreground, with radio) appears to be carrying an L72A9 LASM rocket attached to his pack. Though they never succeeded, the Taliban repeatedly tried to shoot down Chinooks (which they nicknamed 'Cows'), knowing the propaganda value of downing a helicopter with probably heavy consequent casualties. During intensive phases of fighting the resupply and medevac helicopters were repeatedly engaged by RPGs and heavy machine guns. (MOD Crown Copyright)

The final stages of *Panchai Palang* ran concurrently with the US Marines entering Helmand once again. In the largest offensive operation conducted by the USMC since 'Phantom Fury' in Fallujah, Iraq, three battalions advanced into central Helmand with the aim of denying the region to the insurgents and providing security for the elections. The operation culminated in the US Marines pushing into the insurgent-held town of Dahaneh and securing it after four days of brutal urban combat.

The battle for dominance in Kajaki continued, with the mortar teams attached to I Coy, 2 Rifles becoming so adept that they could respond to an individual fire mission with each one of their three tubes – in one particularly 'hot' pitched battle they were firing on 31 individual enemy firing points. Sangin continued to earn its reputation as the most dangerous town in Afghanistan; a contracted Mi-26 resupply helicopter was shot down over the town in July, and six British soldiers were killed in the run-up to the elections, including five from 2 Rifles in two IED incidents. Some progress was made, with the provincial governor moving out of the fortified DC and into the newly secured Sangin Government Zone; but, disappointingly, only 434 people turned out to vote in Sangin from a total of 16,000 registered voters.

During the tour, 498 TICs were recorded with 35 deaths, 46 seriously wounded and 85 other wounded. Improvised explosive devices were now the principal killers of British forces in Helmand; 'Herrick X' saw 426 recorded IED incidents in total, with 84 of these detonating against or in close proximity to UK patrols. Six insurgent IED teams were killed by 2 Rifles, and Battle Group search teams discovered more than 250 devices – one team alone found 19 during their tour, including one constructed entirely of wood to fool the electronic detectors.

'Moshtarak'

The 'Herrick XI' deployment under 11th Lt Bde in October 2009 was the largest yet, with battalions from the Grenadier Guards, Coldstream Guards, Rifles, Yorks, Royal Anglians and Royal Welsh, along with reinforcements

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

'Herrick XII': an FSG from 40 Cdo RM engaging the enemy with both a Javelin ATGM and a 51mm L9A1 infantry mortar; a mortar round is just visible in the air. At right is a Yamaha Grizzly quad bike, often used for ammunition resupply and for casualty evacuation. (MOD Crown Copyright)

from 1 Scots (Royal Scots Borderers) and Duke of Lancaster's Regiment. Right Flank Coy, 1 Scots Guards deployed later, joining the Grenadiers battle group. The focus for this deployment would be Operation *'Moshtarak'* ('Together'). The plan called for a joint force of Canadians, Danes, Americans, British and Afghans to clear Nad Ali and Lashkar Gah districts and the insurgent stronghold of Marjah, thus securing the majority of central Helmand. It was also to be an important test for both the ANA's ability to lead large-scale offensive operations, and for Gen McChrystal's 'government in a box' concept.

In shaping operations, the Household Cavalry Regt's CVRTs and the Danes deployed into the desert to limit insurgent movement and resupply from the east, while the Scots Guards deployed south of Nad Ali. This operation would see the first use in anger of the massive British Trojan armoured engineering vehicle, with its Python 'hose charge' minefield-breaching system, to clear a wadi outside Nad Ali of IEDs. The USMC would be solely responsible for Marjah and cordoned the town in advance, dropping leaflets to warn the civilian population of the coming offensive.

In February 2010 the final phase of *Moshtarak* was launched. The Royal Welsh and Grenadier Guards, partnered with ANA *kandaks*, moved into the western outskirts of Babaji, while the Coldstream Guards and their *kandak*

This 40 Cdo RM platoon marksman equipped with an L129A1 rifle, and a machine-gunner with an L7A2 GPMG, 'cover their arcs'. Both wear MTP uniforms, Mk 7 helmets, and the 'black bag issue' Oakley gloves. Each Herrick rotation received additional theatre-specific equipment supplied in a black holdall – hence the term 'black bag kit'. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

advanced into downtown Babaji itself. With the insurgents fleeing, the British and ANA soon controlled much of the northern Nad Ali district (including the village of Showal, with its IED factories). The USMC and ANA assaulted into Marjah, encountering pockets of fierce resistance and belts of IEDs, but eventually subduing the opposition after more than a week of urban combat.

* * *

From April 2010, 4 Mech Bde commanded the 'Herrick XII' rotation, with a core force built around the Scots Guards, 1 Scots, Mercians, Duke of Lancaster's, 40 Cdo RM, Royal Gurkha Rifles and Royal Dragoon Guards. The RDG may stand as an example of how these forces were employed. The regiment deployed three squadrons and a reconnaissance troop to Helmand: B Sqn took over the Mastiff Group (now known officially as the Protected Mobility Squadron); C Sqn was tasked as an ANP Partnering Sqn; D Sqn manned the Viking Group as a brigade-level asset; and Recce Troop, mounted in the newly arrived Ridgebacks, were tasked with force protection for Regional Command (South) Headquarters. (This underlines the fact that UK units, whether infantry or not, had long been expected to handle almost any task. The Scots Guards company who had come out early to join the Grenadiers had been intended to man Warriors, but instead found themselves making a helicopter insertion.)

For 4 Mech Bde, the immediate priority was to begin operations to consolidate the gains from *Moshtarak*. Operation *'Tor Shezada'* ('Black Prince') into the town of Saidabad, between Nad Ali and Marjah, was designed to target insurgents who had been attacking the USMC in Marjah. The 1st Bn, Duke of Lancaster's Regt, partnered with an ANA *kandak*, advanced into the town after a pre-dawn air assault by the BRF had secured key terrain. The insurgents had largely disappeared, leaving IEDs behind them. Eventually, ANA patrol bases were established around the town to secure it.

E UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT (III): SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

1: Special Boat Service, 2006

This SBS operator is equipped for a direct-action raid. His helmet is the Global Armour PASCUT, procured in small numbers for UK Special Forces. He wears a temperate DPM-pattern SAS hooded smock with desert DPM combat trousers, a Blackhawk Industries plate carrier in olive drab, kneepads, and Lowa desert boots. The rifle magazines in the pouches low on his left side have black rubber Magpul extensions, and the outer pouch has two pistol magazine pouches attached to the front. The elements of his PRR are worn high, and mounted centrally below them is a SERPA holster for his L105A1 (SIG Sauer P226) pistol. His primary weapon is the UKSF's standard Diemaco L119A1 rifle, here with an Aimpoint red dot sight (although the ACOG 4-power site was more common), PEQ2 infra-red illuminator, and KAC QD suppressor.

2: Special Forces Support Group, 2011

The old 'chocolate chip' camo cover under the netting on his Gentex Modular Integrated Communications Helmet (MICH) indicates that this soldier is from the 1 Para element of the SFSG; note also the PVS-21 mount for night-vision goggles. He wears full 'Crye kit', as it is known in the British Army – the Crye MultiCam Combat Uniform favoured by UK Special Forces. Note the built-in kneepads, and mid-thigh pockets for use when seated. His plate carrier is the Paraclete Releasable Assault Vest (RAV) in Ranger Green, and his boots are Karrimor Outbacks. His secondary weapon is again the L105A1 pistol on a spiral lanyard, its holster mounted centrally above the mainly Blackhawk pouches. He carries a PRC-148 Multiband Inter/Intra Team Radio (MBITR) in the pouch behind his left hip, with a cable up to its mic unit clipped to his shoulder. His primary weapon is again the L119A1 rifle with suppressor, this time with an EOTech sight for close-quarter battle.

3: Pathfinder Platoon, 16 Air Assault Brigade, 2010/2011

Dismounted from his 'Wimick', this soldier carries an L110A1 Minimi LMG. Non-issue items include a popular baseball cap, here with a subdued Union Jack patch (helmets were generally only worn during planned operations); an olive- drab-and-black *shemagh*, as widely seen in the Army ever since Operation 'Desert Storm' in 1990/1991; and Merrell Sawtooth hiking boots. Over his T-shirt and desert DPM trousers he wears a unit-purchased Paraclete Special Operations Hard Plate Carrier (SOHPC). Plate carriers were often preferred to full body armour by units operating in vehicles and by Special Forces, who judged that the greater freedom of movement outweighed the lower levels of protection. Note the weapon-cleaning brush carried in a loop on his chest.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A soldier of 1st Bn, Royal Gurkha Rifles in 2010, carrying both an extendable assault ladder and a backpack ECM kit. Under magnification, the 'Black Rats' patch of 4 Mech Bde (see Plate C1b) is just visible on his upper left sleeve below a Velcro tab displaying his 'zap number'. (MOD Crown Copyright)

Marjah was not the only American presence in Helmand, as 2010 also saw a USMC surge into Musa Qalah, Sangin, Now Zad and Kajaki. During that year the Americans would formally take control of these areas, and much of northern and southern Helmand, while the British concentrated their efforts on the central part of the province. Unfortunately, Gen McChrystal would not see the fruits of his labour, since he resigned after contentious quotes were attributed to him by a *Rolling Stone* magazine journalist.

The beginning of the end

In July 2010, ISAF made the long-anticipated announcement that the majority of combat troops would withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014. Britain would only leave in place several hundred training personnel and potentially a small Special Forces contingent. In September 2010, in a historic move, Sangin was handed over to the Americans by 40 Cdo Royal Marines. Since the beginning of 'Herrick', 106 British soldiers had been killed in and around the town and hundreds seriously wounded. Sangin, sometimes referred to by British soldiers as 'Sangingrad', now featured among the battle-honours of several UK units.

In October 2010, 16 Air Asslt Bde returned to Helmand for the third time to command the 'Herrick XIII' rotation, with elements drawn from 2 and 3 Para, 1 Royal Irish, Duke of Lancaster's, Royal Highland Fusiliers (2 Scots), Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (5 Scots), and the Irish Guards. The Household Cavalry Regt and 2 RTR deployed again to man the CVRTs and Mastiffs respectively. The deployment's focus was on the professional development of the Afghan security forces, and all operations were now 'partnered', with the Afghans (at least officially) in the lead. With British mentoring, the ANA in Helmand were reaching the stage where they could plan and conduct their own operations – a key requirement for progress to ISAF Stage Four.

Offensive operations continued in central Helmand, particularly around the trouble-spots of Nad Ali and Showal. The ANA conducted their first air assault into Nahr-e Saraj under the keen mentorship of their Irish Guards Advisory Group. New equipment was still coming on line, including the Wolfhound Tactical Support Vehicle, and the eagerly awaited and significantly improved replacement for the Viking, the Warthog, which deployed to the province with D Sqn, Royal Dragoon Guards.

Detail of the Odin turret fitted to a Spartan CVRT as part of the TES-H upgrade, to protect the GPMG gunner from small-arms fire and fragments. The vehicle commander is talking with two US Marines during joint operations in 2010. (MOD Crown Copyright)

Although most fatalities were caused by IEDs, a new threat was now becoming dangerously common: so-called 'Green-on-Blue' shootings, when members of the Afghan security forces ('Green') deliberately fired upon ISAF troops ('Blue'). Initially, ISAF attempted to

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

An articulated Warthog Armoured All-Terrain Vehicle (AATV) displaying its well-worn bar armour, and Platt after-market turret mounting a General Purpose Machine Gun. The Warthog replaced the Viking from 'Herrick XIII' in late 2010; though visually similar, it offered greater armoured and blast protection and had an upgraded engine. (MOD Crown Copyright)

blame these incidents on Taliban infiltrators, but many were apparently caused by 'cultural grievances'. Afghan fighting men had no tradition of disciplined soldiering in the Western sense, and an exaggerated sensitivity about 'losing face', so individuals might become murderously enraged by such a trivial slight as being publicly rebuked for poor drills. With the British working ever more closely with Afghan units the risks of such incidents increased. As their number grew, British force-protection tactics were revised to include the use of 'guardian angels', who would remain armed and in full body armour to watch their Afghan partners. By the most accurate data available, it would appear that 22 British soldiers were killed in such incidents during the whole Helmand campaign.

'Herrick XVI': Foxhound – the long-awaited replacement for the Land Rover Snatch, designed specifically for the Helmand environment – was not deployed until 2012. This vehicle of 4 Mech Bde features two GPMGs mounted on the roof, an ECM system, and Barracuda camouflage netting; see also Plate G1. (MOD Crown Copyright)

2011– 2013: STAGE FOUR TRANSITION

For 'Herrick XIV', 3 Cdo Bde returned in April 2011 with a task force comprising elements of 42 and 45 Cdos RM, 1 Rifles, 4 Scots (The Highlanders), the Mercians and the Gurkhas, with the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards and Royal Lancers crewing the Warthogs and CVRTs respectively. The key word for this tour was 'transition', a process that would eventually see all of central Helmand transferred to Afghan security forces under ISAF Stage Four. The British director of the ISAF Transition & Assessment Group explained to an interviewer in frank terms that 'Our model of transition is Support with a big S, governance with a reasonable-sized G, and development with a small D – development is a slower burn over a longer time frame. The problem is – well, one of the problems is – each geographical area has a different starting point, and maybe a different end point, and a different journey to get there.'

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

While Task Force Helmand continued to carry out offensive operations to shape the environment toward transition, these were Afghan-planned and Afghan-led, with British forces in a mentoring role. Many aggressively targeted the IED-makers and opium-producers, and Task Force Helmand captured some 7.5 tonnes of home-made explosives (HME) during this tour. They also managed for the first time to 'suppress the fighting season' (as their CO put it) by targeting the insurgent leadership while making far greater use of Afghan forces.

The British also attempted to bypass long-standing community suspicion of the ANP by establishing the Afghan Local Police. This ALP programme had mixed success. In Nad Ali it was largely credited with securing the district, as former 'Tier Two' Talibs joined the ALP militia in a similar fashion to the earlier 'Sons of Iraq' programme, but elsewhere in Helmand it simply put more armed militiamen on the streets. Another historic moment was reached in July 2011 when Lashkar Gah was handed over to Afghan security forces. Nad Ali and Nahr-e Saraj were next on the list. British forces were still taking casualties, but at a greatly reduced rate (including deaths from IEDs, which were effectively halved).

* * *

October 2011 ushered in 'Herrick XV' under the command of 20 Armd Bde, with units drawn from the Black Watch, 1 Yorks, 2 Rifles, 5 Rifles, 2 Mercians and 1 PWRR, plus elements of 3 Yorks, Queen's Royal Hussars and Queen's Dragoon Guards. The tour's key missions were continuing the professional development of the ANA and ANP, and maintaining stability to enable continued transition.

In November security for Nad Ali was handed over to the Afghans; but 'Herrick XV' also saw Task Force Helmand units involved in some particularly 'kinetic' operations alongside the ANA, including a bayonet-charge by members of 1 PWRR to break out of a particularly nasty ambush. ln February 2012 the Task Force captured an SPG-9 recoilless rifle in an air-assault operation, and elements from the Queen's Royal Hussars and 1 PWRR engaged in running gun-battles with insurgents during Operation *'Zamary Takhta'* ('Lion's Rage') in the Lashkar Gah district.

An operation to disrupt a number of IED cells that had been planting devices on the main Highway 611 was launched in March with the BRF, the Warthogs of the Queen's Dragoon Guards, and 1 Yorks simultaneously conducting air and ground assaults against the targeted compounds. The Warriors of the Armd Inf Platoon, manned by 3 Yorks, interdicted a number of insurgents who attempted to flank the assault force; but in the same month a massive IED destroyed a Warrior, killing six soldiers – the first such loss in Helmand.

* * *

The 'Herrick XVI' Task Force deployed in April 2012 was commanded by 12 Mech Bde with units from the Grenadier Guards, Welsh Guards, 1 Royal Anglians, 3 Rifles, Gurkhas, Yorks and Royal Welch Fusiliers, plus elements from the RTR, Light Dragoons and King's Royal Hussars. While mentoring the Afghans the Task Force also provided security screens and overwatch for ANA offensive operations. The Foxhound Light Protected Patrol Vehicle

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

(LPPV), the ultimate replacement for the Land Rover Snatch, was finally delivered in time to see combat with the advisory teams attached to the Afghan *kandaks*.

Early in the tour Operation *'Shafuq'* ('Dawn'), a large-scale counter-IED operation, was launched with 170 members of 3 Rifles and 1 Royal Anglians mentoring and providing overwatch for the ANA. For his self-sacrificing courage on 13 June 2012, L/Cpl James Ashworth of 1 Grenadier Guards would be awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. After exposing himself to enemy fire to allow his fire team to advance, he crawled forward again under fire to grenade a Taliban position, but was hit as he stood up to do so, and died by his own grenade. In August the BRF, comprising men of the Light Dragoons, left their Jackals behind to conduct an air assault in USMC MV-22B Ospreys for Operation *'Daas'* ('Scythe') into the Upper Gereshk Valley. This raid on a series of caves recovered 330lb (150kg) of HME without a shot being fired before the extraction, when the BRF received ineffectual harassing fire.

'Herrick XVII': an LMG gunner from B Coy, 1st Bn, Yorkshire Regt gazes out across a barren field during the winter tour in 2012/13. His weapon has the stock collapsed, and still mounts the older SUSAT sight. He wears the MTP uniform including Osprey Mk 4 body armour and a cover for the Mk 7A helmet. Note the thick wall of the compound; to say they were 'built of mud' does not convey their strength, and it could take a heavy charge like an anti-tank bar mine to breach them. (MOD Crown Copyright)

US 'surge' forces were largely withdrawn by the end of summer 2012, and Nahr-e Saraj began the transition process, with checkpoints being handed over to the Afghan security forces. Lashkar Gah and some 60 per cent of Nad Ali were now under Afghan control. British casualties from IEDs were again halved due to a number of factors, including the issue of the improved Vallon Mk 3 detector incorporating ground-penetrating radar, and the increased availability of protected vehicles and helicopters.

* * *

'Herrick XVII' under 4 Mech Bde in October 2012 saw the last deployment of 40 Cdo RM, alongside elements from the Scots Guards, 1 Scots (Royal Scots Borderers), Duke of Lancaster's, 1 Yorks, Gurkhas, Mercians, the Queen's Royal Lancers and Royal Dragoon Guards.

During this tour, 40 Cdo's roles give an example of a battalion group's tasking during this late transition period. The Commando deployed with their HQ and four companies. Alpha Coy was Operations Coy North, in Transition Support Unit Nahr-e Saraj; this put them on one hour's notice to move, as both a theatre strategic reserve and a strike element to conduct targeted air-assault operations. As the tour progressed and Nahr-e Saraj was handed over to the Afghans, Alpha Coy's role became one of supporting the Afghan forces as and when requested. Bravo Coy was tasked as Ops Coy South, conducting partnered offensive operations into the Green Zone, including fighting patrols and sniper-initiated ambushes against IED teams. Charlie Coy was deployed within Nahr-e Saraj to mentor a number of ANP and ANA units. While conducting first-aid instruction, two members of the company were killed in a confused firefight with off-duty Afghan police in an apparent 'Green-on-Blue' attack. The incident allegedly resulted from the drug-using policemen 'losing face' after being disarmed by British soldiers at a checkpoint the day before. Delta Coy was tasked as the Advisor Team Enabling Company (ATEC), supporting and mentoring Afghan security forces and providing 'guardian angels' for ISAF training teams. All companies also provided access to ISTAR support for Afghan-led operations.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Task Force Helmand continued the transition of Nad Ali district by district as checkpoints and patrol bases were handed over. An ANA Officer Academy was also built in Kabul and partially staffed by British instructors. 'Green-on-Blue' attacks remained a constant concern, with six UK soldiers killed in such incidents during the tour. A continual decrease in IED casualties and the increase in deaths from 'Green-on-Blue' attacks saw the overall number of fatalities from small-arms fire actually overtake those from IEDs during 2012.

* * *

'Herrick XVIII' deployed in April 2013 and was commanded by 1 Mech Bde, with units drawn from the Irish Guards, 2 Scots (Royal Highland Fusiliers), Duke of Lancaster's, Royal Fusiliers, 4 Rifles, the RTR and the Household Cavalry Regiment. Latterly, deployments to Helmand had seen units stretched to meet their responsibilities, particularly in terms of training and mentoring the Afghans. On 'Herrick XVIII', for example, elements from 2 RTR were tasked as the Transition Support Unit in the provincial capital; as the Warthog Group; and also provided an ISAF Training Team mentoring an ANA *kandak*.

Operations against IED cells continued, with the BRF raiding an IED factory in May and recovering quantities of HME and a motorcycle designed as a Vehicle-Borne IED (VBIED). Further checkpoints were handed over to the Afghans as part of the transition: at the beginning of this tour the British still occupied 37 patrol bases across central Helmand, but by its conclusion in October 2013 only 12 remained in British hands. Command of Task Force Helmand also moved from Lashkar Gah to Camp Bastion as part of the drawdown.

Tragically, in May a 27-tonne Mastiff 2 was overturned by a huge IED blast on Highway 611, killing three soldiers and wounding six. This was the first time in seven years of operations that a Mastiff had been destroyed (though it was not penetrated), and the first-ever deaths in that vehicle type. The deaths in both Warrior and Mastiff re-ignited argument in the British press over the level of protection afforded the troops, but those with Helmand experience understood that the struggle with the bomb-makers would inevitably evolve: as armoured vehicles improved, the bombs just got bigger.

* * *

In October 2013 'Herrick XIX' deployed under 7 Armd Bde, with units drawn from the Coldstream Guards, 4 Scots (Highlanders), Royal Anglians,

F

VEHICLES (I)

1: Land Rover Snatch 2

The much-criticized Snatch was originally designed as a lightly armoured patrol/riot control vehicle for duty in Northern Ireland. Its use in Helmand was ill-advised at best; casualties were high, and in June 2008 the deaths of three Territorial SAS personnel and the first female soldier killed in Helmand led to public calls for its replacement. The distinctive Barracuda netting, which acts as both traditional camouflage netting and 'thermal insulation' against thermal imaging sights, is fitted over the rear body and the door of this vehicle. A top-cover gunner mans an LMG **(1a)**; note the ballistic glass folding screens that provide him with some limited protection.

2: Jackal 1 M-WMIK

Starting in 2007, the Jackal 1 largely replaced the Land Rover WMIKs in theatre as a platform for FSGs and reconnaissance elements. This vehicle is shown with a mounted L134A1 GMG **(2a)**, which can fire 40mm grenades at a rate of *c.*340rpm out to 2,000 yards at area targets. The grenade-launcher is supported by an L7A2 GPMG in a passenger-side mount. The Jackal 1 can be easily distinguished from the later 2 and 2A versions by its externally mounted spare tyre; the original SF version can be distinguished by its lack of doors and appliqué armour.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

'Herrick XVIII': a sniper of the BRF covers comrades who are raiding an IED factory in the Green Zone. Note the improvised 'bench rest' he has rigged to steady his suppressed L115A3 sniper rifle against the tree. (MOD Crown Copyright)

Mercians, Royal Welsh, Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, Queen's Royal Lancers and Queen's Own Yeomanry. Their tour was extended to June 2014 due to the impending withdrawal of all British troops. Task Force Helmand continued to support operations by providing overwatch and flank security with their better armour and ISTAR systems, but increasingly the ANA were able to operate independently.

ENDEX

The headquarters for 'Herrick XX', deployed in April 2014, was (coincidentally) provided by 20 Armoured Brigade. Now operating predominantly out of Camp Bastion, the deployment was tasked with assisting with Afghan election security, and managing the process of redeploying all British equipment back to the United Kingdom. This final deployment included elements of 1 Armd Div, 1 PWRR, three battalions of The Rifles, the Queen's Dragoon Guards and the Queen's Royal Hussars. The final British combat base in Helmand, Observation Post Sterga, was closed in May 2014, although British force elements – in particular the BRF and Warthog Group – continued to support Afghan operations. On 1 April 2014, Task Force Helmand was officially disbanded, with its remaining functions being subsumed into the US-led Regional Command (South-West). The US Marines departed from Sangin in May.

As of October 2014, the Task Force had suffered 453 deaths and 2,177 wounded (including a small number of UK civilians wounded in-theatre), making it the second-largest 'butcher's bill' in ISAF after that paid by US forces. In short, Helmand was almost twice as dangerous in terms of the number of casualties incurred as its nearest rival, Kandahar province. The number of enemy and civilian deaths is unknown.

Predictably, during the 2014 'fighting season' the Taliban exploited the drawdown of British and US troops in Helmand, and the political debacle following the disputed result of the Afghan national elections. Insurgents launched a number of concerted, large-scale operations against Sangin, Musa Qalah, Now Zad and Kajaki. More than 200 ANP and ANA personnel were killed during these attacks, and insurgent casualties are estimated at 400-plus. The insurgency made some notable gains, including threatening the DC

'Herrick XIX': an LMG gunner from 3 Mercians covers his arc, while troops of the battle group's Armoured Infantry element dismount from upgraded Warriors. Note the desert-tan furniture and ACOG sight of his Minimi, and the 7th Armd Bde 'Desert Rats' patch on the left sleeve of his MTP-pattern UBACS shirt. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

in Musa Qalah. However, Afghan forces with much-reduced ISAF air support managed to blunt the Taliban offensive and, in Sangin at least, they launched a brief counter-offensive in July supported by Afghan AF helicopters and aircraft. Reportedly, Afghan officers in Sangin have since entered negotiations with the Taliban over a 'security agreement'.

British forces were then concentrated at the rapidly shrinking Camp Bastion, and at the ANA Officer Academy in Kabul. On the same campus the most senior Coalition officer to be killed in Afghanistan, a US Army major-general, was murdered in a 'Green-on-Blue' attack on 5 August 2014. The Bilateral Security Agreement finally signed by the new Afghan government in September allows for some 9,800 US troops to remain in-country, along with a much smaller 3,000-strong ISAF contingent. On 27 October 2014 Camp Bastion was officially handed over to the ANA by the commander of the final combat element of the RAF Regiment. Thereafter the only official British contribution will be to provide training at the ANA Officer Academy. Rumours of a 200-strong UKSF 'stay-behind' detachment to operate alongside US SF in the counter-terrorism role have been neither officially confirmed nor denied.

* * *

While the departure from Bastion has immediately been followed by an unflinching public discussion, it is not the purpose of this book to judge to what extent British forces were successful in their mission in Helmand. Indeed, it is difficult to identify exactly what that mission was, since the political and military objectives changed as 'the goalposts were moved'. Helmand was perhaps another case of too much, for too long, with too little. The British Army and Royal Marines did as they always have done: they slogged on, despite a lack of manpower, helicopters and suitable vehicles, against a ghostlike enemy whose motives, intentions and even identity were difficult to establish. Despite these tremendous obstacles, and their sometimes restrictive rules of engagement, it is a testament to their professional skills and *esprit de corps* that no British unit was ever beaten in battle, nor a single British soldier captured.

WEAPONS & EQUIPMENT

INFANTRY SMALL ARMS

UK forces deploying into Helmand in 2006 carried largely the same weapons as they did in southern Iraq. The four-man fire team was equipped with the 5.56mm L85A2 assault rifle (aka the SA80A2), the 5.56mm L86A2 Light Support Weapon (LSW), the 5.56mm L110A1 Light Machine Gun (LMG, aka 'Minimi'), and the 40mm L123A2 Underslung Grenade-Launcher (UGL) mounted under an L85A2. Conditions soon proved that enhancements and several entirely new weapons were required in Helmand.

The L85A2 rifle, significantly overhauled by Heckler & Koch to rectify the reliability issues that had plagued the L85A1, was now seen by the troops as a reliable and

'Herrick X': men of 7 Platoon, 2 Coy, 1 Welsh Guards engaging enemy firing points during Operation 'Panther's Claw' in June 2009. Interestingly, both the L85A2 and the LMG still mount the older SUSAT optic. The 4-power ACOG, which featured a Docter mini-sight above the main optic for close-quarter battle, became available in 2008. It performed well, but was itself replaced from 2011 with the 4-power ELCAN Lightweight Day Sight. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

This shot shows the standard weapons of a fire team. The lead man carries an L82A2 with Picatinny rails and Grip Pod, the centre man's rifle has the 40mm UGL fitted, and the third has the L110A1 Minimi Light Machine Gun. Note the kneepads worn on one knee only, and PRRs worn under the Mk 6A helmets. The lead man also wears a trial plate-carrier in MultiCam pattern. (Photo by Cpl John Scott Rafoss; courtesy ISAF)

effective weapon, and in range tests it proved more accurate than any of its peers. However, it lacked mounting rails for attaching lights or infra-red illuminators, and it featured the ageing L9A1 Sight Unit Small Arms Trilux (SUSAT) optic. In 2007 a Picatinny rail system was added, allowing the fitting of a Grip Pod vertical foregrip incorporating a collapsible bipod, and an LLM01 Laser Light Module. Other Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) improvements included EOTech Holographic sights for the UGL, Vortex flash suppressors, and new Magpul magazines. From 2008 the SUSAT was replaced with the 4-power Advanced Combat Optical Gunsight (ACOG), which featured a Docter mini-sight above the main optic for close-quarter battle (CQB). This was itself replaced from 2011 with the 4-power ELCAN Lightweight Day Sight. The 40mm L123A2 UGL fitted to the rifle was considered superior to the American M203, and could drop high-explosive or smoke grenades out to 350 yards-plus.

The disliked L86A2 LSW was rarely seen on patrol in Afghanistan; taking the same 30-round magazine as the rifle, it lacked sustained suppressive firepower. The 5.56mm L110Al LMG (Minimi) performed admirably in the light support role, and was well liked despite the short barrel that limited its effective range to 300–400 yards at best. The LMG was prized for both its suppressive ability and its utility in clearing compounds, and its success led to a UOR purchase of a 7.62mm version offering increased range and penetration in a platform that is one-third lighter than the General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG). This 7.62mm Minimi (or 'Maximi') saw limited deployment into theatre beginning in 2012.

As the insurgents increasingly initiated contact with RPGs and PKM machine guns to stay out of the effective range of British 5.56mm small arms, the 7.62mm L7A2 GPMG was increasingly pushed down to the section level, where it retained its reputation as 'queen of the battlefield'. These firefights

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

became contests between insurgent PKMs and RPGs and British GPMGs and sniper rifles (though it was the Javelin ATGM of Fire Support Groups that often ended such contacts decisively). To remedy this imbalance, a platoon marksman was appointed and equipped with a 7.62mm L96A1 bolt-action sniper rifle to provide precision at extended ranges (at this time, specialist snipers at unit level were receiving the heavier .338 L115A3 Lapua Magnum rifle). As the concept proved successful a dedicated marksman rifle was procured: the 7.62mm L129A1 semi-automatic fitted with a 6-power ACOG optic. This weapon proved popular both with marksmen and with the spotters from sniper teams (UKSF had procured the similar HK417 several years earlier through their own channels).

Sniper Platoon snipers loved the new .338 round's increased range and killing power. In Musa Qalah in 2009 a Household Cavalry sniper armed with an L115A3 set a new world record with a kill at an incredible 1.53 miles (2.47km). Firing on an insurgent PKM team and with his spotter adjusting his shots, he used nine rounds to range in on the pair before killing both and disabling the PKM machine gun. Another record shot occurred in December 2013 when a sniper from the Coldstream Guards managed to kill six insurgents with a single round. During a contact in the Char-e Mirza region the Guardsman engaged an insurgent who was part of a group of Taliban; unknown to him, the target happened to be wearing a suicide vest. To the considerable surprise of both parties, the .338 round detonated the vest, killing all six of the enemy.

Another new weapon was the L128A1 combat shotgun based on the semi-automatic Benelli M4. Requested by 16 Air Asslt Bde during their 2008 tour, to equip the point-men during compound clearances and patrols in the often *bocage*-like terrain of the Green Zone, the L128A1 was another UOR success story, fielded just six months after the request. The need for a portable weapon for use at extremely close range, e.g. when clearing compound entrances and tunnels, also led to a resurgence of pistols. From 2007, all infantry soldiers deploying to Helmand were issued a sidearm – generally the 9mm L105A2 (SIG-Sauer P226R), although some compact L107A1s (P228s) and L117A1s (P229s) also surfaced. The venerable L9A1 Browning Hi-Power was still issued to support personnel. In 2013 the L131A1 Glock (17) was declared the replacement for the Browning and the SIGs.

BELOW LEFT
GPMG gunner from 2 Para's Machine Gun Platoon at Kajaki Dam, firing at distant targets; his L7A2 has the shoulder stock removed and is on a Sustained Fire (SF) mount. This mount has proved popular, enabling targets to be engaged well beyond the L7A2's stated 1,800-yard effective range. The green webbing on the Para's head supports the headset for his PRR. (MOD Crown Copyright)

BELOW
Sniper from 2 Para (note subdued black jump-wings and blue DZ flash) pictured in 2008 somewhere in the Upper Sangin Valley, providing overwatch with his camouflaged .338 L115A3 Lapua Magnum sniper rifle. On his right wrist is a privately purchased Garmin GPS, and barely visible inked on the stock of his rifle are his range calculations – these are known as 'DOPE', for Data On Previous Engagements. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

One Royal Anglians sniper discovered the advantages of a pistol during his 2008 tour. Rounding an alleyway corner, he virtually ran into an AK47-armed insurgent; both fired, and only the sniper's fast and accurate drills with his Browning saved him. Another sniper had a similar point-blank encounter later on the same tour, when an insurgent armed with an RPG popped up from behind a wall immediately in front of him. The sniper managed to physically strike the insurgent in the face with his pistol, forcing him back before emptying the magazine into him.

Light Anti-tank Weapons (LAWs) were valuable both as 'bunker-busters' against prepared firing points and for blowing holes through compound walls. The AT-4 Interim LAW (ILAW) was heavily used until 2008, when it was largely replaced with the updated L72A9 Light Anti-structure Munition (LASM). Finally, the L2A1 ASM (a version of the Israeli Matador) arrived in-theatre from 2011; this is an impressive if ungainly weapon that can be programmed to 'mousehole' through a wall before exploding its main charge, and has an effective range of about 500 yards.

The British soldier still cherishes the .50caI Browning HMG, known as the L111A1 in UK service, for its long range and ability to punch through cover. Equally popular was the 40mm L134A1 GMG automatic grenade-launcher. Fire Support Groups equipped with the .50cal HMG and the GMG could effectively suppress any target within line-of-sight.

UK Special Forces

UK Special Forces continued their time-honoured tradition of carrying their own selection of small arms, although the quality gap between SF and regular infantry weapons narrowed considerably during the course of the war. The standard SF rifle remains the L119A1, an M4-style carbine based on the Canadian Diemaco C8 Special Forces Weapon. Special Forces operate the L119A1 with several different barrel lengths, and a range of optics; it is often fitted with a 40mm H&K UGL called the L17A1. In Helmand, UKSF also used the L74A1 – a Remington 870 with folding stock – as a breaching shotgun, with specialist rounds such as the Hatton.

Personal protective equipment

Osprey Mk 1 body armour was being issued from late in 'Herrick IV', replacing the Iraq-era Enhanced Combat Body Armour (ECBA) with its small

G

VEHICLES (II)

1: Foxhound Light Protected Patrol Vehicle

The Foxhound LPPV, the eventual successor to Snatch and Vector and deployed from 2012, was designed from scratch as a general-tasks vehicle for the Helmand environment. Carrying two crew and four other soldiers, the Foxhound has a V-shaped hull to channel IED blasts away from the main compartment, and swing mounts for two defensive General Purpose Machine Guns. It was designed to use its high speed and manoeuvrability to get itself out of trouble, being intended for use as, for example, a transport for mentoring teams with the ANA rather than as a fire-support platform.

(1a) Head-on view, with right-hand swing mount for GPMG.

2: BvS 10 Viking All-Terrain Vehicle (Protected)

The Viking ATV(P), with two articulated cabins, entered the theatre in late 2008 during 3 Cdo Bde's deployment for 'Herrick IX', with the Royal Marines Armoured Support Company. Although designed for amphibious use in an Arctic environment, the Viking provided the first true protected-movement capability for Task Force Helmand. Able to carry three infantry fire teams along with a crew of two, it also had a Protected Weapons Station for a GPMG or .50cal HMG. Although they were armoured, by 2009 almost a quarter of the fleet had been destroyed by mine and IED blasts, leading to their replacement by the similar-looking but up-armoured and improved Warthog.

(2a) Stencilled markings on rear side of front cabin – vehicle number '0A' and 'RMASC'. The number on the temporary cardboard sign on the protected gun mount had to suffice when this marking was covered by the Barracuda netting.

(2b) An infra-red chemical light-stick was often suspended in an empty clear-plastic water bottle from the rear aerial (above and left from the detail view), for station-keeping after dark.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

ABOVE
A Royal Highland Fusilier of 2 Scots operating an L134A1 GMG mounted on a Jackal; an ACOG sight has been fitted to the grenade-launcher to improve long-range accuracy. The Jock carries a most important bit of kit on the front of his Osprey body armour – a large, soft paintbrush to keep dust out of the weapon's working parts. (MOD Crown Copyright)

ABOVE RIGHT
Personal protective equipment: this soldier from The Highlanders (4th Scots) is seen in 2011 wearing Osprey Mk 4 body armour with cummerbund and side plates, and Pelvic Ballistic Protection. All his pouches are arranged at his sides to allow him to adopt a prone position for firing; this will also reduce the risk of the pouch contents becoming flying hazards in the event of an IED blast. His L85A2 rifle is fitted with Daniel Defense desert-tan rails, Grip Pod, ACOG sight, Vortex flash-hider and Magpul EMAG magazine. (MOD Crown Copyright)

ballistic plates. While heavy, the Osprey gave greatly improved protection. Kestrel armour was also available for 'top-cover' vehicle gunners who were otherwise entirely exposed, but the weight and bulkiness of this 'Elvis Suit' largely precluded its use on dismounted operations.

The Osprey Mk 1 was replaced in 2008 by the Mk 2, featuring external trauma plates in plate carrier-style pouches, and improved ballistic coverage. The Mk 3 and Mk 4 followed; both are recognizable by the return to internally fitted plates, and the Mk 4 has the new MTP camo pattern. The latest Mk 4A armour features a detachable ballistic collar, side plates and shoulder pads. Although the Osprey has Modular Lightweight Load-Carrying Equipment (MOLLE)-compatible attachment strips, soldiers were discouraged from attaching items such as pistol holsters or multi-tools to the front, as these could increase facial injuries in the event of an IED blast. Rather than MOLLE pouches, many soldiers preferred old-style Personal Load Carrying Equipment (PLCE) pouches worn below the armour.[3]

To combat the IED threat, the Pelvic Ballistic Protection system was issued from 2011. This is made up of several elements, the most commonly used being Kevlar underpants and an external groin-protector. A study from Camp Bastion's field hospital reported that those wearing this kit were ten times less likely to sustain a groin wound. Special leg protectors are also available for RESTs and others involved in IED clearance.

To protect the head, the Mk 7A helmet has been issued since 2008, replacing the Mk 6A version. The Mk 7A now enables the soldier to fire his weapon comfortably in the prone position while wearing body armour; earlier combinations would push the front rim down, interfering with the use of sights. Also designed for the safety of the individual soldier is the Thales GPS locator beacon, deployed for the first time on 'Herrick XVII'. Issued to each man, this can send a signal to a receiver carried by his section leader which displays the soldier's exact location as a GPS reference. This can rapidly be transmitted to other friendly ground or air assets in the event of a soldier becoming lost or surrounded.

Protected mobility

The Protected Patrol Vehicle (PPV) is the UK term for what the US called the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) class of wheeled armoured vehicle, designed from the ground up to minimize mine or IED impact. The MOD purchased a modified US model, the Force Protection Inc Cougar 6x6,

3 For detailed illustrations of Osprey armour, see Elite 202 *The British Army since 2000*.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Four Jackal 1 M-WMIKs parked at an FOB; while the background vehicles are obscured, two mount the .50cal HMG and two the L134A1 GMG automatic grenade-launcher. All carry sand channels and self-recovery winches, and copious amounts of fuel and water for extended MOG operations. (Photo courtesy Pete Gill)

known in UK service as the Mastiff; this can accommodate a complete rifle section, and has a total payload of 5 tonnes plus.

Before the Mastiff, UK troops were using the controversial Land Rover Snatch 2, a lightly armoured 4x4 designed to give protection from small-arms fire and petrol bombs in Northern Ireland. When casualties caused a media clamour in 2008 a replacement had already been deployed into theatre, the Pinzgauer Vector; this 6x6 light truck proved a poor solution, but remained in use by EOD and Fire Support Teams. Snatch Vixen, an upgraded Snatch 2, was announced as a UOR replacement for the Vector; it benefited from belly armour and blast deflectors to channel the effects of a ground explosion away from the crew and passenger areas. By the time 32 Vixens arrived in December 2008 the first few Mastiffs were also available, which reduced the need to use Vixen 'outside the wire'. A further replacement for both Snatch and Vixen, the excellent Foxhound, would not see service until 2012. Various other light protected mobility vehicles that were also procured included the Panther Command & Liaison Vehicle, and the Husky Tactical Support Vehicle-Medium, which formally replaced the Vector. Both were deployed extensively for force protection, resupply escort, and for use by mentoring teams.

A Land Rover-based platform that did earn popularity with troops was the Wolf WMIK, a stripped-down 'gunship' version of the Land Rover designed for use by recce and FSG units. The WMIK received several upgrades; the first, Enhanced or E-WMIK, arrived during 'Herrick V', and featured armoured blast plates underneath. The Refurbished or R-WMIK deployed during 'Herrick VI' had run-flat tires, a new roll bar and greatly improved

Mastiff 2 PPV (right) and Wolfhound TSV pictured at Camp Bastion. Note that the EPBA bar armour does not extend across the rear cargo area of the Wolfhound, this being a compromise to allow easy loading and unloading. This heavily armoured vehicle based on the Mastiff 3 chassis can carry some 9,900lb (4,500kg) of cargo. (MOD Crown Copyright)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Detailed view of the Platt MR550 upgrade turret fitted to a Viking AATV, manned by a trooper of the Queen's Royal Lancers during Operation 'Eagle's Summit' in September 2008. The attractive but non-regulation stencil on the gunshield combines the skull-and-crossbones of the QRL cap badge with the palm tree of Rommel's *Afrikakorps.* (USMC photo by Gny Sgt Clint Runyon)

suspension. Both E-WMIK and R-WMIK featured the Modular Armour Protection Installation Kit (MAPIK) of 'bolt-on' appliqué ballistic armour.

A replacement for the WMIK was deployed from 2007: the three-man Jackal 1 Mobility WMIK (M-WMIK). A second version with a more powerful engine, appliqué armour and room for a fourth soldier was deployed in 2009 as the Jackal 2, and the final 2A version had a redesigned cab that increased crew protection against mines and IEDs. In addition to the Menacity surveillance, reconnaissance and offensive-action vehicle, UKSF employed the Bushmaster Escapade Protected Mobility Vehicle and the Teller Duro II & III, the latter also used by EOD and counter-IED teams.

Along with the 6x6 Mastiff, a 4x4 version called the Ridgeback was also procured. The Ridgeback and Mastiff both received additional armour over the windows rather than the firing ports featured on the US version, and were also fitted with bar armour to counter RPGs. The Mastiff and Ridgeback provided protected mobility, although significantly restricted by the Afghan terrain. The Jackal and its larger cousin, the six-wheel Coyote Tactical Support Vehicle (TSV), could access worse terrain but lacked significant armour protection.

Bridging the gap were a number of tracked armoured platforms. Although the British resisted deploying their main battle tank, the Challenger 2, the venerable CVRT family gave exemplary service in all but the most punishing

H

VEHICLES (III)

1: FV107 Scimitar CVRT (Theatre Entry Standard-Herrick)
The Scimitar TES-H illustrated represents a vehicle from *c.*2007. Along with EPBA, it features numerous other Helmand-specific modifications including additional wire-cutters, the rear-mounted counter-IED ECM system, another forward-mounted ECM system (the two boxes mounted on swing arms at the front corners of the hull), and expanded rear stowage areas.
(1a) Typical stowage around the turret front smoke-bomb dischargers.

2: Scimitar Mk 2
The Scimitar Mk 2 is a direct evolution of the earlier TES-H variant, taking into account further lessons learned in Afghanistan. This model is built from the larger Spartan hull, the size of which allows a more powerful engine, new suspension, increased armour (both ceramic appliqué and bar), and blast protection. Other enhancements include an air-conditioning system, improved night-vision equipment, and blast-resistant seating for the crew.
(2a) Side view of rear mounting deck for ECM.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

A 'Vallon man' – an infantryman with a Vallon mine-detector – carefully dusts sand away from a suspected IED; his detector and rifle with UGL lie by his feet. Once a device was confirmed it was marked and logged, and a request was made for callsign 'Brimstone' (an EOD team) to attend and render it safe. The task of sweeping with the detector was known as 'Barma-ing' after the name of the set of search drills: Operation 'Barma'; Operation 'Kala' was a similar set of techniques for clearing compounds. Until the arrival of the improved Vallon VMR-3 in 2011 the issued detectors did not have a ground-penetrating radar capability, making it problematic to locate the increasingly common devices that were constructed with a low metal content. (MOD Crown Copyright)

environments. The CVRTs received Helmand-specific modifications, such as the Odin GPMG turret fitted to the Spartan version. The Scimitar Mk 2 was built from a Spartan chassis fitted with a Scimitar turret, enhanced optics, engine, cooling and blast protection. (On 'Herrick XV' a Scimitar Mk 2 was hit by a large IED, but the crew escaped unharmed.)

For protected infantry transport in rough terrain, the articulated two-cabin BvS 10 Viking and its replacement, the Warthog, were deployed. The FV510 Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle was deployed with the Armoured Infantry Group from autumn 2007, with numerous enhancements from experience in Iraq: counter-IED ECM, additional belly armour, Chobham armoured skirts, and the now-universal bar armour. The Warrior Reactive Armour Plating 2 (WRAP-2) explosive reactive armour was not fitted, as the key threat it was designed to counter, Explosively Formed Penetrator IEDs, had not been encountered in any numbers in Helmand. The older FV-series APC was also upgraded for deployment. This enhanced FV432, now known as the FV430 Bulldog Mk 3, is equipped with a mix of reactive, passive appliqué and bar armour, along with a new engine pack, optics, air conditioning and a Remote Weapons Station.

Counter-IED

The IED is perhaps the ideal 'asymmetric' weapon. Using a simple pressure-plate mechanism, it can lie in wait untended for months or even years, or it can be deployed with more sophisticated triggers to precisely target a specific vehicle or even the search teams sent out to find it. The Afghan *mujahideen* had considerable experience in using mines and HMEs to ambush Soviet columns, and many of the same tactics were employed against the British in Helmand. The devices tended to lack the sophistication of those produced during the Iraqi insurgency, but their simplicity and cheapness meant they could be manufactured in huge numbers.

Three principal types were encountered in Afghanistan: the command-wire IED, the remote/radio-control IED, and the (most often met) pressure-plate or victim-operated IED. All are constructed around four common elements: a fuse or initiator, the explosive itself (normally a fertilizer-based HME, often packed into bright yellow jugs that formerly held cooking oil), a detonator, and a battery to power that detonator. The differences revolve around size, purpose, and how the device is triggered.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

The command-wire IED is electrically fired by an insurgent with a line-of-sight to the target, and is the most difficult to jam or disrupt by technical means. It tends to be larger, for targeting vehicles. The remote/radio control IED is triggered by a radio, mobile (celI) phone, pager, garage door-opener or similar transmitting device. This type of device, which was commonly encountered in Iraq, is the easiest to disrupt by counter-lED jammers and other technical means.

The pressure-plate or victim-operated IED was sowed in large numbers to harass and channel British forces. Many were constructed using a low metal content to disguise their presence from metal detectors. Designed principally as an anti-personnel device, it may be 'daisy-chained' to a number of other devices (aka 'spider IEDs') or boosted by landmines to increase the explosive effect.

Counter-IED measures in Helmand focused on three approaches: preparing the troops through IED awareness/ground-sign training, and the provision of protective equipment; defeating the device itself by using specialist search and route-clearance teams, EOD and counter-IED systems; and attacking the network of insurgents constructing the IEDs, using a mix of forensic, signals and human intelligence to develop targets for Special Forces. At the sharp end, infantrymen were trained to sweep for devices and search for ground-sign; an operator was known as the 'Vallon man', after the manufacturer of the principal detector. Vehicles and dismounted patrols were also passively protected by a series of ECM devices which threw an 'electronic safety net' around them to disrupt the detonation of certain types, particularly radio- or similar remote-controlled devices.

A Tarantula Hawk ('T-Hawk') Micro Remote Piloted Air System (RPAS) deployed as part of the 'Talisman' route-clearance teams. This little UAV can stay aloft for up to 40 minutes, relaying live video from its two infra-red-capable cameras. (MOD Crown Copyright)

The British Army EOD teams were known as 'Brimstone' callsigns, and worked either directly with the battle group or as a theatre-wide High Readiness Force. Supporting the EOD teams were the RESTs, specialist searchers who did the painstaking fingertip searches for devices ahead of the bomb-disposal operators. Brimstone and RESTs were called in after a suspected device had been spotted by a patrol. They would search and clear the immediate area of other IEDs before rendering the device safe, by manual defusing if it was not feasible to use technical means to destroy it remotely.

For clearance of roads and tracks the RE teams known as 'Talisman' comprised a number of systems: a six-wheel Buffalo Mine Protected Clearance Vehicle (MPCV) equipped with a 30-foot remote control arm and a host of cameras and counter-IED sensors; a Mastiff 2 'Protected Eyes' PPV command vehicle, fitted with a mine plough, cameras and a Remote Weapons Station; a wheeled earth-mover known as the High Mobility Engineer Excavator (HMEE); a MIRA Unmanned Ground Vehicle built from a Land

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

The Coyote TSV is the six-wheel variant of the Jackal. Under magnification, this TSV shows a rare example of British, Australian and USMC personnel all sharing one vehicle. A quick-change barrel can be seen to the left of the British .50cal HMG gunner. (USMC photo by Cpl Timothy P. Chesnavage)

Rover Snatch and used to conduct a final check of a cleared route; a tracked EOD robot called a Dragon Runner; and a Honeywell Tarantula-Hawk UAV fitted with cameras. The T-Hawk transmitted live video to the crew of the command Mastiff, who could send the Buffalo forward to use its arm and sensors to uncover the suspect device. The Dragon Runner could then be deployed to gather intelligence on the device or to physically disrupt it, while the HMEE filled in any ditches or craters that might impede progress.

The British also deployed the massive Trojan Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineers (AVRE), based on the Challenger main battle tank and equipped with an excavator arm, a mine plough, and fascines to fill in ditches. It can also deploy the trailer-mounted Python rocket which can explosively clear a safe lane over 180 yards long – ideal when supporting operations into IED-infested insurgent base areas.

Fatalities from IEDs and mines increased year on year until 2011, when the rate halved (to 28, from 55 in 2010) due to improved detection and countermeasures, increased attrition of enemy IED networks, and a reduction in UK-led operations. The IED fatality rate continued to reduce by over 50 per cent each year, with 13 in 2012 and only four in 2013. However, the long-term mental health injuries to British soldiers operating in IED-infested environments cannot be quantified.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

For the reader who would like to understand Britain's war in Helmand in more depth, the author recommends the following works:

2 Rifles, *2 Rifles – Helmand Diary 2009*. Lavishly designed special edition of the regimental journal, *The Bugle*.

Benitz, Max, *Six Months without Sundays: The Scots Guards in Afghanistan* (Edinburgh; Birlinn, 2011). A balanced and readable account of the Scots Guards on 'Herrick XII'.

Bishop, Patrick, *3 Para* (London; Harper Perennial, 2007). The first book on the British in Helmand, and still one of the best accounts of the Paras at war.

Bishop, Patrick, *Ground Truth* (London; Harper Perennial, 2009). Follow-up documenting the Paras on their 'Herrick VIII' tour.

Black Watch, *Aviation Assault Battle Group* (Barnsley; Pen & Sword Military, 2011). Compiled as a 'Herrick X' tour diary, this includes an exceptional array of operations maps and individual accounts.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

Bury, Patrick, *Callsign Hades* (London; Simon & Schuster, 2010). An instant classic in the field of platoon-commander memoirs, from a young lieutenant with 1 Royal Irish on 'Herrick VIII'.

Dorney, LtCol Richard, *The Killing Zone* (London; Ebury, 2012). The CO's balanced account of the Grenadier Guards' 2007 tour.

Harnden, Toby, *Dead Men Risen: The Welsh Guards and the Real Story of Britain's War in Afghanistan* (London; Quercus, 2011). Outstanding account of the Welsh Guards' harrowing 2009 tour.

Hennessy, Patrick, *Kandak: Fighting with Afghans* (London; Allen Lane, 2012). Thoughtful memoir by a Grenadier Guards officer who served in an OMLT with an ANA battalion in 2007, and who later returned to Afghanistan to follow up the story of the Afghan soldiers with whom he served.

Kemp, Col Richard & Chris Hughes, *Attack State Red* (London; Michael Joseph, 2009). The definitive account of the Royal Anglians' 2007 tour, effortlessly bridging the strategic and tactical in a highly readable manner.

Ledwidge, Frank, *Investment ln Blood: The True Cost of Britain's Afghan War* (London; Yale University Press, 2013). A grim but necessary accounting of Operation 'Herrick', essential to understanding why and how the war was fought.

Lewis, Maj Russell, *Company Commander* (London; Virgin, 2012). An insightful account of 2 Para's hard-fought 'Herrick VIII' tour.

Martin, Mike, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict* (London, Hurst, 2014). A revelatory work – the one book needed by the reader seeking to understand Helmand and its people.

Rayment, Sean, *Into the Killing Zone: The Real Story from the Frontline in Afghanistan* (London; Constable, 2008). Excellent overview of the 2006–2008 period, from an experienced former-Para journalist.

Reynolds, LtCol D.J., *The Battle for Helmand: The Paras in Southern Afghanistan* (Plymouth; DRA Publishing, 2007). Published in association with *Pegasus* Journal, this tour-de-force on 'Herrick IV' offers many unique images and individual accounts.

Schulze, Carl, *Task Force Helmand: Vehicles of the British ISAF Forces in Afghanistan 2011* (Erlangen; Tankograd, 2011). Essential photographic record of the wide array of vehicles in service with the UK Battle Groups in 2011.

Scott, Jake, *Blood Clot: ln Combat with the Patrols Platoon, 3 Para, Afghanistan 2006* (Solihull; Helion, 2008). This former NCO's account is valuable as a counter-balance to the many works written by officers.

Southeby-Tailyour, Ewen, *3 Commando Brigade* (London; Ebury, 2008). Detailed account of the Commandos' tour on 'Herrick V' by a former Royal Marine officer with unusual insider access.

Southeby-Tailyour, Ewen, *3 Commando Brigade: Helmand Assault* (London; Ebury, 2010). Follow-up detailing the 'Herrick IX' tour.

Tootal, Col Stuart, *Danger Close: Commanding 3 PARA in Afghanistan* (London; John Murray, 2009). Insights into the defining 2006 tour, from the officer who had to translate Whitehall thinking into O-Group orders.

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

INDEX

Note: Page references in **bold** refer to photographs and captions. References in brackets refer to plate captions.

1 Armoured Div 50
1 Mechanized Bde 48
1 Scots (Royal Scots Borderers) 41, 42, 47–48
2 Para **26–27(CB2)**, **34**, 35, 44, **53**
2 Scots (Royal Highland Fusiliers) 35, 44, 48, **56**
3 Commando Brigade **9**, 24–26, **25**, 28–29, 36–37, 45–46
3 Para **34**, 35, 44
3 Para Battle Group 12–17, **16**, 24, 25, **14–15(A)**
3 Scots (Black Watch) 38, 46
4 Mechanized Bde 42, 44, **44**, **45**, 47–48
4 Scots (The Highlanders) 35, 45–46, 48, **56**
5 Scots (Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders) 35, 44
7 Armoured Bde 48, 50
7th Parachute Regt, Royal Horse Artillery (7 RHA) 13, 14, **16**, 23
11th Light Bde 40–42
12 Mechanized Brigade **26–27(C3)**, 29, 32–33, 46–47
16 Air Asslt Bde **14–15(A1b)**, 44–45
19 Light Bde 38–40
20 Armoured Brigade 46, 50–51
52 Infantry Bde 33–35

Afghan National Army (ANA) 14, 32, 33, 37, **38**, **39**, 41, 41–42, 42, 44, 46, 47, 48, 50–51
Afghan National Police (ANP) 10, 10–11, 33, 42, 46, 50–51
Afghan Roulement Infantry Battalions (ARIBs) 9
air support 18, 21, **21**, 22, 23, 32, 51
Australian Army **16**

body armour **8**, **13**, **14–15(A)**, **26–27(C)**, **36**, **39**, **47**, 54, 56, **56**

Camp Bastion 17, 48, 50, 51
Canadian Army 22, 29
casualties 5, 9, 11, 18, 21, 24, 26, 28, 29, **32**, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 44–45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 51, 62
Challenger 2 battle tank 58
Coldstream Guards 33, 40, **40**, 41–42, 48, 53
Combat Logistics Patrols (CLPs) **11**, 23
Combat Vehicles Reconnaissance Tracked (CVRTs) 13, 30, 34, 35, 39, 41, 44, 45, **58–59(H2)**, 60
counter-insurgency (COIN) 6, 17
Coyote TSV **62**

Danger Close fire missions 21
Danish forces 16, 23, 37, 39
District Centres (DCs) 18
dogs and dog handlers **10**
Duke of Lancaster's Regt 41, 42, 44, 47–48, 48

Estonian forces 16, 29
Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) 13, **60**, 61

Fire Support Groups (FSGs) 12, **30–31(D)**, 53
Fire Support Teams (FSTs) 21, **30–31(D)**
Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) 18, 21
Foxhound Light Protected Patrol Vehicle **45**, 46–47, **54–55(G1)**

Green Zone, the 6, **7(map)**, 30, 32
Green-on-Blue attacks 44–45, 47, 48, 51
Grenadier Guards 30, 32, 33, 40, 41–42, 46–47
Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) 30

helicopter support 5, 13–14, **16**, **20**, 28, 36, 37, **40**
Helmand Province 6, **7(map)**, 8, 10–11
Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) 14
helmets **13**, **14–15(A)**, **25**, **26–27(C1)**, **34**, **41**, **42–43(E)**, **47**, **52**, 56
Household Cavalry Regt 13, 23, 33–34, 35, 41, 44, 48, 53
Husky Protected Support Vehicle (PSV) **32**

improvised explosive devices (IEDs) 6, 10, 29, 33, 34–35, 37, 39, 40, 46, 47, 48, 56, 60–62, **60**, **61**
Information Exploitation Group (IX Group) 36–37
inkblot strategy 20, 32
International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) 4–5, 9, 44, 45–46
ISTAR (intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance) 6, 29, 30, 32, 36, 47

Jackal M-WMIK **9**, 36, 37, **48–49(F1)**, **56**, **57**, 58
Jugroom Fort, raid on 26, 28

Kajaki Dam 6, 24, 26, **34**, **35**, 36, 40, 44, **53**
King's Royal Hussars 34, 46–47

Land Rover (CAV) Snatch 5, 13, 18, 37, **48–49(F1)**, 57
Land Rover Enhanced WMIK (E-WMIK) 26, 57–58
Land Rover Wolf Weapon Mount Installation Kit (WMIK) 13, **18–19(B)**, 57–58
Lashkar Gah 6, 14, 18, 39, 41, 46, 47
Light Dragoons 24, 28, 30, 39, 46–47
Light Electronic Warfare Teams (LEWTs) 13, 29

McChrystal, Gen Stanley 38, 41, 44
Manoeuvre Outreach Groups (MOGs) 23
Mastiff 1 PPV 30, 32, 34, **35**, 37, 57
Mastiff 2 PPV 39, 44, 48, **57**
Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT) 13–14
Mercian Regt 30, 38, 39, **39**, 42, 45–46, 46, 47–48, 50, **50**
Mobile Operations Groups (MOGs) 28
Musa Qalah 18, **18–19(B)**, 20, 22–23, 33, 34–35, 37, 44, 51, 53

Now Zad 18, 20, 23, 24, 26, 37, 44

Operation 'Eagle's Summit' **34**, **35**, 36, **58**
Operation 'Enduring Freedom' 8–9, 11
Operation 'Herrick' 5, 8, 9
Operation 'Herrick IV' 10–11, 17–18, 24
Operation 'Herrick V' 24–26, 28–29
Operation 'Herrick VI' 29–30, 32–33
Operation 'Herrick VII' 33–35
Operation 'Herrick VIII' 35–36
Operation 'Herrick IX' 36–37, **36**
Operation 'Herrick X' 37, 38–40, **39**, **51**
Operation 'Herrick XI' 40–42, **40**
Operation 'Herrick XII' **41**, 42, 44
Operation 'Herrick XIII' 44–45
Operation 'Herrick XIV' 45–46
Operation 'Herrick XV' 46
Operation 'Herrick XVI' 46–47
Operation 'Herrick XVII' 47–48, **47**
Operation 'Herrick XVIII' 48, **50**
Operation 'Herrick XIX' 48, 50, **50**
Operation 'Herrick XX' 50–51
Operation '*Panchai Palang*' ('Panther's Claw') 39–40, **51**
Operational Mentoring & Liaison Teams (OMLT) 14

Pathfinder Platoon 12–13, **18–19(B)**, 22–23, **42–43(E3)**
Patrol Bases 32, 33, 35
Pinzgauer Truck Utility Medium (TUM) light truck 13
platoon houses 20–21, 23–24, 24–25
Princess of Wales's Royal Regt (PWRR) 35, 36–37, 46, 50

Queen's Dragoon Guards 37, 46, 50
Queen's Own Yeomanry 50
Queen's Royal Lancers 35, 47–48, 50, **58**
Quick Reaction Force (QRF) 18

Richards, General David 4–5
Ridgebacks 37, 42, 58
The Rifles 36–37, 38, **38**, 40, 45–46, 46, 46–47, 48, 50
route-clearance **35**, **60**, 61–62, **61**
Royal Air Force 13–14, **21**, 23, 51
Royal Anglian Regt 30, 32, 40, 46–47, 48, 54
Royal Dragoon Guards **12**, **26–27(C1)**, 42, 44, 47–48
Royal Engineers 13, 17
Royal Fusiliers 23, 48
Royal Gurkha Rifles 12, 18, 20, 21, 23, 33, 36–37, 42, **44**, 45–46, 46–47, 47–48
Royal Irish Regt 12, **14–15(A1c)**, 20, **22**, 23, 35, 44
Royal Marine Commandos **9**, **14–15(A)**, 24–26, 28–29
  40 Commando 33, 34, **41**, 42, 44, 47–48
  42 Commando **8**, 22, 24, **24**, **25**, 36–37, **36**, 45–46
  45 Commando 24, 25, 36–37, 45–46
Royal Scots Dragoon Guards 45–46, 50
Royal Tank Regt (RTR) 30, 39, 46–47, 48
Royal Welsh Regt 30, 40, 41–42, 50
Rules of Engagement (ROE) 33

Sangin 18, 20, **20**, 21–22, 26, 29, 36–37, 40, 44, 51
Scimitar CVRT 13, **58–59(H1)**
Scimitar Mk 2 CVRT **58–59(H2)**, 60
Scots Guards **32**, 33, 34, 41, 42, 47–48
snipers **12**, 23, **50**, 53, **53**, 54
Spartan CVRT 13, **44**

Taliban, the 8–10, 11, 18, 21, 23, 24, 30, 34, 39
Task Force Helmand 29–30, 33, 35, 50
Trojan Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineers (AVRE) 41, 62
troops-in-contact (TICs) 23, **30–31(D)**, 40

UK Land Forces Command Support Group 25
UK Special Forces 16–17, 20–21, 34, 38, **42–43(E)**, 51, 54
uniforms & equipment **14–15(A)**, **26–27(C)**, **26–27(C1)**, **34**, **41**, **42–43(E)**
United States of America and US forces 8, 9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 32, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40, 42, 44, **44**, 47

Victoria Cross awards 22, 47
Viking All-Terrain Vehicle (Protected) 25, **54–55(G2)**, **58**, 60

Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV) **28**, 33, 35, 36–37, 38, 42, **50**
Warthog Armoured All-Terrain Vehicle 45, **45**, 60
Weapons **4**,51-4
  machine guns 12, **14–15(A)**, **22**, 25–26, **41**, 52–53, **52**, **53**, 54
  missiles 12, **24**, **39**, **40**, **41**, 53
  mortars 12, **14–15(A)**, **41**
  pistols **8**, **14–15(A)**, 53–54
  rifles **4**, **10**, **12**, **14–15(A)**, **24**, **26–27(CB2)**, **41**, **42–43(E1)**, 51–52, **51**, **52**, 53, **53**
Welsh Guards **13**, 38, 39, 46–47, **51**
Wolfhound Tactical Support Vehicle 37, 44, **57**

Yorkshire Regt (Green Howards) 33, 34, 40, 46, 46–47, 47–48, **47**

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com

First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Osprey Publishing
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
PO Box 3985, New York, NY 10185–3985, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

Osprey Publishing, part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

© 2015 Osprey Publishing Ltd.

All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

© Osprey Publishing. Access to this book is not digitally restricted. In return, we ask you that you use it for personal, non--commercial purposes only. Please don't upload this ebook to a peer--to--peer site, email it to everyone you know, or resell it. Osprey Publishing reserves all rights to its digital content and no part of these products may be copied, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise (except as permitted here), without the written permission of the publisher. Please support our continuing book publishing programme by using this e--book responsibly.

Every effort has been made by the Publisher to secure permissions to use the images in this publication. If there has been any oversight we would be happy to rectify the situation and written submission should be made to Osprey Publishing.A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

PDF ebook ISBN: 978 1 4728 0676 5
ePub ebook ISBN: 978 1 4728 0677 2
Editor: Martin Windrow
Index by Alan Rutter
Typeset in Sabon

www.ospreypublishing.com

DEDICATION

For all who have served on Operation 'Herrick' and supporting operations – all gave some, some gave all

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks, as always, to my wife Jodi; to my comrades still serving in various capacities within the British Army and Royal Marines, who have provided significant insights for this book; and to Martin Windrow and Kate Moore at Osprey.

ARTIST'S NOTE

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Peter Dennis, Fieldhead, The Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG18 2AT, UK

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter

Acronyms used in this text, in addition to standard abbreviations of unit titles:

ALP	Afghan Local Police (militia)
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ATGM	anti-tank guided missile
Bn	Battalion
BRF	Brigade Reconnaissance Force
CAS	close air support
CLP	combat logistics patrol (i.e. supply column in hostile environment)
Coy	Company
DC	District Centre
ECM	electronic countermeasures
EOD	explosive ordnance disposal
FSG	Fire Support Group
FST	Fire Support Team
GMG	'grenade machine gun' (automatic grenade-launcher)
GMLRS	Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System
GPMG	general-purpose machine gun
HME	home-made explosives
HMG	heavy machine gun
IED	improvised explosive device
ISTAR	intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition & reconnaissance
LAW	light anti-tank weapon
LEWT	Light Electronic Warfare Team
LMG	light machine gun
LPPV	Light Protected Patrol Vehicle
MERT	Medical Emergency Response Team
MOG	Manoeuvre Outreach Team/ Mobile Operations Group
OMLT	Operational Mentoring & Liaison Team (with ANA)
PB	patrol base
PRR	Personal Role Radio
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
REST	Royal Engineers Search Teams
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
TIC	'troops in contact' (i.e. a clash with the enemy)
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle ('drone')
UGL	Underslung Grenade-Launcher (on rifle)
UKSF	United Kingdom Special Forces
UOR	Urgent Operational Requirements programme
VCP	vehicle check point
WMIK	Weapon Mount Installation Kit (on vehicle)

© Osprey Publishing • www.ospreypublishing.com